The Muslim Voice

January 2004 Volume 10 Issue 3 Hajj Issue

Butterflies in Islam
pg 4

Reviving the Islamic Spirit
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The Essence of Hajj
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Journey to Islam
pg 20

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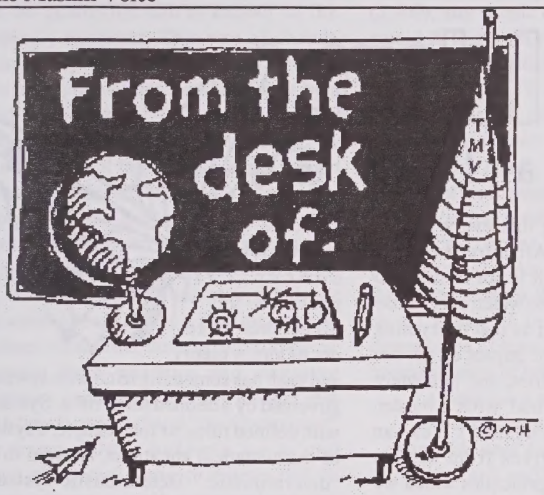


THE MUSLIM VOICE

Assalaamu alaikum,

The past few months have been truly remarkable. For many Muslims, the month of Ramadan is the highlight of the year and surely many would agree that the last one simply flew by before our eyes. Amid the hustle and bustle of extra worship, nightly festivities and more frequent mosque visits, there was hardly any time remaining to fit school in. In past years, as a university student, I found it challenging to uphold the true essence of Ramadan. Late classes would prevent me from reaching home in time to have *iftaar* with family. Often that meant discretely breaking fast during class in front of an unaware professor, or simply squeezing in a date and prayer in solitude before returning to my studies. Indeed, it seemed that Ramadan and university life frequently clashed.

This year proved to be a stark and much-welcomed contrast. The frequency of 'squeezed-in' *iftaars* and breaking fast alone at school sharply declined for many Muslims on campus with the introduction of free iftaars on campus. These daily *iftaars* proved to be such an incredible venture that most days there were people sitting on the floor eating because of the massive turn-out. The number of new faces was astonishing. But new faces quickly became familiar ones and by the end of the month many new friendships had developed. Brotherhood and sisterhood grew stronger by the day. Having been used to breaking fast with a few friends while reading a textbook in the library, I found myself drawn to the *iftaars* day after day. I assure you that this force was not the lure of a free meal. It was the comfort in knowing that although I couldn't be home with my family to have *iftaar* as in past years, there was a whole new family on campus that I could share Ramadan with.

Another heart-warming aspect of Ramadan was the endless generosity everyone displayed. Of course, the *iftaars* would not have been possible without sponsors, but the generosity did not end there. The food, toy, and clothing drives brought in record numbers of donations. Furthermore, the orphan sponsorship initiative to sponsor 30 orphans surpassed its goal. *SubhanAllah*, Allah (*subhana wa ta'ala*) is truly Great. This year's Ramadan experience was a remarkable accomplishment and I can honestly say that I don't remember enjoying the month more.

It's hard to believe, then, that not so long ago spirits around the Muslim world were so high and yet today some Muslims face a disheartening future; a future where they are prevented from expressing their spirituality and beliefs. The right to wear *hijab*, or any religious symbol for that matter, should be a right given to each person. Yet this fundamental right has a precarious future. The increasingly secular government of France is debating a ban on all forms of religious symbols in state schools. The ban, however, seems targeted at the *hijab*. After all, it was the head of the commission on secularism in French society, Bernard Stasi, who described the *hijab* ban as a "chance for Islam to save itself." The debate is heavily backed by feminist sentiment purporting that the *hijab* is oppressive. Ironically, these feminists who have concentrated over a century's efforts on empowering women in order to give them the freedom of choice are now denying the same principle to those they claim to represent.

France aspires to achieve staunch separation between church and state. Perhaps the country finds the five-million strong community of Muslims inhabiting their land threatening. Germany also seems to be headed down the same path where banning *hijab* for government employees seems to be a desperate attempt to cope with the increasing population of *hijab*-donning German women. The paths of both of these countries are bound to lead to a clash with the European Convention of Human Rights which guarantees the right to freedom and religion. What these countries fail to realize is that force and ordainment only lead to alienation and frustration. A perfect example of the outcome of such emotions is the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Thus, it is necessary for France to consider all possible repercussions of the decision before the decision is made.

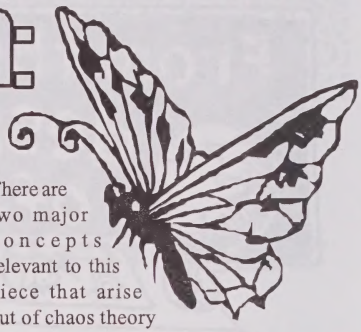
Canadians have felt a similar yet smaller dose of this anti-*hijab* sentiment. It began a decade ago when Ontario's French-loyalist neighbor expelled a schoolgirl for wearing the *hijab*. It was believed to be a threat to the secularism of Quebec schools. In some schools intolerance went so far as to request Muslim students not to fast during Ramadan. The recurrence of Muslim students having to choose between religion and education is proof that Canada is not far behind France's erring ways.

It is crucial for each one of us to voice our indignation at such a blatant attempt to violate the fundamental rights of our sisters in Islam, both locally and abroad. During Ramadan it was so easy to take comfort in the blanket of unity owing to the idea that every single Muslim was doing exactly what you were doing. Every able-bodied Muslim around the globe was observing their fasts, enjoying *iftaar* festivities, frequenting the mosque. The contentment from Ramadan was shared by all. It is imperative to go beyond sharing our joys and share our struggles and hardships as well. Together, *inshaAllah*, our voice will be stronger and our efforts more meaningful and productive.

Zeenat Malam
Editor, *The Muslim Voice*
Wasalaamu alaikum

Butterflies in Islam:

Why a little is a lot



"In whatever business thou mayest be and whatever portion thou mayest be reciting from the Qur'an and whatever deed ye (humankind) may be doing We are Witnesses thereof when ye are deeply engrossed therein. Nor is hidden from thy Lord (so much as) the weight of an atom on the earth or in heaven. And not the least and not the greatest of these things but are recorded in a clear Record."

[Qur'an, 10:61]

To paraphrase, I believe that Allah (*subhana wa ta'ala*) is telling us that in whatever you are occupied, be it your occupation, when you recite the Qur'an, or any other work you may be doing, Allah (*subhana wa ta'ala*) and the angels are a witness to your actions, and even the smallest things that you do are recorded.

For me, the question that arises first after reading this verse is: Why is everything so important, even something that is physically or figuratively less than an atom's weight? Is it to increase our already burdensome lives? Are we not all caught up in the rat-race, working to live, and barely alive enough to work or extend ourselves any further? Is this the burden of Muslims that the other monotheistic religions balk at, suggesting that Islam, unlike other religions, guarantees nothing in the end, that our fate is always in the balance, and that we must always be on guard? On top of all this, it is not just the big things that Allah (*subhana wa ta'ala*) is aware of, but also the tiniest little things!

Well, the psychology of behavior modification is beyond the scope of this article and beyond my area of expertise, but I feel that if Islam is a prescription for internal and external peace, then change must come about by active application, not benign neglect.

We are told in the Qur'an:

"Surely Allah does not change the condition of a people until they change their own condition."

[Qur'an, 13:11]

I suppose that having a slight scientific bent has given me an alternate perspective on the Qur'anic teaching that every minute thing is recorded by Allah (*subhana wa ta'ala*). I believe that it is not so much to burden us with having to watch every little thing we do, but to tell us that everything we do has a significant impact on us, our families, our communities, and ultimately society as a whole. Wow! What a burden — or, what an opportunity! Yes, an opportunity that derives from certain fundamental physical principles which we cannot wiggle our way out of. These principles have been captured in the term "butterfly effect," and derive from concepts fully developed in chaos theory.

Now I do not profess to be an expert in either theology or mathematics. I am, however, an optimist and the first quoted verse brings me much peace when given a certain physical context. So, what about this "butterfly effect"?

It began with Edward Lorenz, a meteorologist who modeled convection currents on computers. Given the lengthy computations necessary on the large and slow computers of his day (the early 1960s), Lorenz decided to write down the intermediate values in his study and continue his simulation at a later time. As he recorded these values, he took the liberty of rounding some of them off to three decimal places or so. But when he later re-started the computer simulation where it had left off, he realized that as the calculations progressed, the results departed from those of an uninterrupted simulation.

The departure from the expected result was not miniscule, even though the discrepancy in starting values was. Apparently, as time passed, the departure grew exponentially! The effect became known as "sensitivity to initial conditions." Given the fact that Lorenz was modeling weather patterns, it was remarked "if the theory (chaos theory) were correct, one flap of a seagull's wings would be enough to alter the course of the weather forever." Lorenz extended this analogy in the title of his lecture, "Predictability: Does the Flap of a Butterfly's Wings in Brazil set off a Tornado in Texas?" Hence, the "butterfly effect."

There are two major concepts relevant to this piece that arise out of chaos theory and each has something to do with systems governed by a defined set of rules. Systems with defined rules, as for example, a system of mathematical equations, are said to be "deterministic." Deterministic systems, even very basic ones, like simple mathematical equations, can show rather complicated behaviors, which have often been described as "seemingly random." But such behavior isn't really random: because it is being generated from a mathematical equation, it just looks very complicated.

Thus, chaos is not really that intuitive sense of disorder we have grown up associating with the word. Rather, it is, at times, the very complicated behavior that emerges from a specific set of rules. Actually it is through rules (or, equations) that the typical behavior of a given system is manifested. If we think of weather, for example, there are a finite amount of weather patterns that can happen, simply because physical rules have to be obeyed; but we are unable to predict which one will occur, or when. We can't expect to get wholly new kinds of weather — that would be weird and frankly, unnatural. Everything in our physical and spiritual environment follows rules, whether we like it or not, and whether we can explain it or not as we are told in the Qur'an:

"Seek they other than the religion of Allah when unto Him submitteth whosoever is in the heavens and the earth, willingly or unwillingly."

[Qur'an, 3: 83]

As mentioned, the other important concept that arises out of chaos theory is "sensitivity to initial conditions," which means that small changes in variables (i.e. the values of mathematical equations) will create profound changes in that system as it evolves over time. These initial changes, or "perturbations," although tiny, can dramatically alter the path a system could take. In chaotic systems, this rate of change

can be quantified and is known as the lyapunov exponent. This rate of change actually represents the distance between two paths, one offset from the other by a small "perturbation." One can imagine that if the paths of a system kept diverging in this exponential fashion, the whole system would explode. Or, if the path of a system kept contracting exponentially, the system would collapse down to a singular point and implode. Chaotic systems that neither blow up, nor implode, must maintain a balance between expansion and contraction. In mathematical terms, these balanced systems contain both positive and negative lyapunov exponents. Is it any wonder that both "the Expander" and "the Constrictor" are among Allah's (*subhana wa ta'ala*) many attributes? Thus, it appears that in Islam, ethereal as well as physical systems exist in a balance of opposing forces. (This can lead also to an in-depth discussion of the concept of "Moderation," which is another topic in and of itself)

So, what about the stuff we can hardly measure, the things we consider unimportant or trivial in our daily lives? — a smile, a simple kind gesture, for example? What place do they have in our day-to-day encounters? Furthermore, what about more overt and profound actions, such as helping the needy, the orphaned, the homeless, the hungry, and the underprivileged? It is so easy to say, "What can I do? I am just one person", or "I can't make a difference."

That the small perturbations mentioned above result in exponential returns is iterated mathematically in *Sura al-Baqarah* verse 261, which states that

"The parable of those who spend their possessions for the sake of Allah is that of a grain out of which grow seven ears, in every ear a hundred grains: for Allah grants manifold increase to whom he wills; and Allah is infinite, all knowing".

If one were to plot the mathematical progression stated in this verse as three points with co-ordinates (1, 1), (2, 7), and (3,700), any simple curve fitting algorithm would fit this to an exponential in the form of $y = y_0 + Ae^{Bx}$ and yield values of $y_0 = 1.0$, A = 0.00045, and B = 4.75. Regardless of the actual values of the parameters, this progression is well approximated by an exponential. Hence, when we invest in the things that are important, as Allah (*subhana wa ta'ala*) has prescribed, then our small investment (1 grain), results in a huge return (700 grains). An exponential return! Remember though, this should be extended to all types of investments, be they investments of time, investments of effort, or investments of behavior.

"A kind word and the veiling of another's want is better than a charitable deed followed by hurt; and Allah is self sufficient, forbearing"

[Qur'an, 2:263].

Well, if it is not enough that the Qur'an tells you that every little thing counts, then, be advised that mathematics says the same thing! Everything does count, and the more we begin to believe and understand this, the less disenfranchised we will feel. We must believe this because it is a reality from which we cannot escape, it is inherent in the fact that we exist as part of a complex social and physical system, governed by rules and equations set down by our singular Creator, Allah (*subhana wa ta'ala*). Let's not fool ourselves into thinking that by non-participation we effect no change. The absence of involvement is just as profound a "perturbation" in the universal system as is an active effort to do so.

So when we lament over the problem of the world's disjointed *Ummah*, we should take a step back and remind ourselves that human-engineered unity is, in and of itself, an unobtainable goal. We can not just will unity to happen, it is a process. The process begins and ends by rigorously applying ourselves to all that the Qur'an prescribes for us. The unity we so yearn for is the natural endpoint of these efforts, provided we follow the prescriptions set forth. If we think social change will come about merely by ritualistic pursuits, then read *Sura Al-Ma'un* (Alms):

"Have you considered him who calls the judgment a lie? That is the one who treats the orphan with harshness and does not urge (others) to feed the poor. So woe to the praying ones, who are unmindful of their prayers, who do (good) to be seen, and withhold the necessaries of life".

[Qur'an,107:1-7]

So, back to the "little things" in life. It is often said that the most successful among us are those who set themselves small, attainable goals. With consistent application to these attainable goals, life then becomes a series of positive reinforcements and ultimately we make it to the culminating point. Conversely, those who set huge, unrealistic goals are more likely to be destined for failure.

So, if we haven't yet obtained the things we hope for as a community or as a society, then we should be looking at our own individual behaviors. It may be that when it was our time to flap our wings and change the weather in Texas, we were sitting in our basement and complaining about our next-door neighbors!

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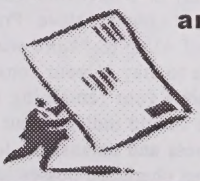

The next submission deadline is:
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The Essence of Hajj

The significance of Hajj as a pillar of Islam is quite evident from the reward this act of worship brings to its performer. As has been reported from Allah's Messenger (*sallAllahu alaihi wasallam*), the person performing the Hajj is forgiven and purified as if he is a newborn baby. Although its importance and formalities are generally known and talked about, its essence, spirit, and its impact on a performer's behaviour and personality is not generally understood or remembered.

The point we should ponder over is why Allah (*subhana wa ta'ala*) and his messenger granted Hajj so much importance. What is the most significant aspect of this worship? Is it performance of certain rites and rituals, the special dress worn, and visitation of certain places that makes it the most rewarding act of worship? Or, like other acts of worship in Islam, is it the changes that Hajj makes in the performer's personality, attitude, and outlook that are the essence of Hajj?

The other point to reflect upon is what is so special about the Hajj that it is expected to produce some significant changes in the personality, attitude, and outlook of a person. Is there anything magical in the rites and rituals of the Hajj that produce the changes or is it the constant conscious effort on the part of the performer to inculcate in himself/herself the spirit of those rites and rituals which brings about the desired changes? The reality is that unless a person performs every step of the Hajj immersed in and imbued with the spirit that each action represents, he/she will not fully realize the promised benefits of Hajj.

This process of consciously soaking in the spirit of Hajj starts with the intention. As soon as you make an intention to perform Hajj, you should start reflecting on the lifestyle of Ibrahim, Isma'el, and Haajirah (*'alayhum assalaam*). Allah (*subhana wa ta'ala*) has presented them as a model Muslim family. Hajj is, in fact, an intensive training in full, holistic, wholehearted, willing, and enthusiastic obedience and submission to Allah (*subhana wa ta'ala*). This training is provided by making the believer simulate acts of love, dedication and obedience performed by Ibrahim and his family (*alayhum assalaam*). Hajj, in reality, is walking in the footsteps of that family, simulating the extraordinary acts of devotion they performed for the love of Allah (*subhana wa ta'ala*). This provides a Muslim with the proper perspective as to how devoted and submissive to Allah (*subhana wa ta'ala*) a Muslim should be. So as soon as you decide to perform Hajj, you should start reviewing your lifestyle vis-à-vis the life style of Ibrahim and his family (*'alayhum assalaam*) and see if you submit to Allah (*subhana wa ta'ala*) without reservation or hesitation as they did. Are you willing to sacrifice your most precious and cherished possessions, habits, preferences, and desires for the sake of Allah (*subhana wa ta'ala*) as Ibrahim (*alayhi assalaam*) did? Can you obey Allah (*subhana wa ta'ala*) without asking questions or without understanding why Allah (*subhana wa ta'ala*) wants us to do certain things? Can you jump into dangers & difficulties willingly and enthusiastically for the sake of Islam as Ibrahim (*alayhi assalaam*) did? Is the pleasure of Allah (*subhana wa ta'ala*) and the supremacy of Islam the most important goals in your life? Do the commands of Allah (*subhana wa ta'ala*), needs of the *Ummah*, and the call of Islam, take precedence in your life over all your interests, needs and aspirations? If the answer to any of these questions is not a resounding yes, you should start identifying where you need improvement and how you are going to get there.

When you start for Hajj from your home, think of it as the beginning of a transformation process and not just a trip to sacred places. Start with a sincere repentance with a firm intention to change yourself to the desired level of commitment to Islam. Form specific mental images about how your attitude, personality, and outlook will be changing from your current state towards the Ibrahimic style and level as you proceed from home towards *Haram* (Makkah). As you move through various stages in your journey, see your paradigm shifting with each step. When you remove your clothes and take a shower to put *Ihraam* on, visualize ridding yourself of all the old habits and behaviour patterns that are not the best from the Islamic point of view and cleanse yourself from intentions and attitudes that are un-Islamic in nature and practice. When you put your *Ihraam* on, think of a new birth and a new beginning – the start of a new life more like that of Ibrahim and Isma'el (*alayhum assalaam*).

While performing each rite of Hajj, keep the spirit of the rite and act of Ibrahim (*'alayhi assalaam*) that it simulates in your mind and feel the transformation of your attitude and personality accordingly. For example, when you arrive in Makkah and cool your eyes with the sight of the Holy Ka'bah and pray to Allah (*subhana wa ta'ala*) to increase its status and its sanctity, remember the purpose for which it was built. Remind yourself of how it was going to be the centre of the Islamic movement to bring the whole of humanity to the worship of Allah (*subhana wa ta'ala*) and obedience to Allah through Islam and to make Allah's law and Islamic way of life the dominant and supreme way of life in this world. Dedicate yourself to that cause as Ibrahim (*'alayhi asalaam*) and his family did.

When performing *Tawaaf* (circumambula-tion), feel the passionate, ardent love of Allah (*subhana wa ta'ala*) making you go round in humility in front of His Greatness, also thinking at the same time that all your life in this world will be Allah-centred, revolving around Him, His Love and His Pleasure. When running between Safaa and Marwah, see yourself running and striving throughout your life for the religion of Allah (*subhana wa ta'ala*) to establish it as the supreme, dominant way of life, while hoping that Allah (*subhana wa ta'ala*) accepts your efforts and rewards you with the success of the Islamic mission in this world and with His Pleasure in the Hereafter; and while at the same time being concerned that you may not be doing enough to achieve your goals or to earn Allah's Pleasure and Mercy.

Standing in 'Arafaat, you should feel the majestic presence of Allah (*subhana wa ta'ala*) in Whose audience you are standing as a humble slave. Preserve that feeling of Allah (*subhana wa ta'ala*)'s presence to stay in your consciousness throughout your remaining life. Your sacrifice should indicate your readiness, willingness and enthusiasm to sacrifice your most cherished possessions for the sake of Allah (*subhana wa ta'ala*). And

throwing pebbles (*Ramy*) at Jumuraat should signify that whatever little means you have, you are going to devote all you have in opposing and rejecting all the un-Islamic theories, isms and secular lifestyles that the *Shayateen* of the world try to preach among Muslims or impose on them.

It is this kind of Hajj that makes you pure and sin-free as if you are a newborn baby. If Hajj is not performed with that kind of spirit, its intended benefits will not be realized. An example from our elders will illustrate this point.

A person, who had just come back from Hajj, came to visit Junaid Baghdaadi (*rahimahullah*). After Junaid asked him where he was coming from, the dialogue between them occurred as follows:

Haajji: I have just come back from Hajj of *Baytullah*.

Junaid: Have you been to Hajj?

Haajji: Yes, I have just performed it.

Junaid: When you proceeded from your home with the intention of Hajj, did you repent from all your sins?

Haajji: I did not think about it.

Junaid: In that case, you did not even depart for Hajj. What about your journey, rest-breaks, and stopovers? When covering distances, did you move mentally and spiritually closer to Allah (*subhana wa ta'ala*) and at stopovers did you feel yourself dwelling in His remembrance?

Haajji: It did not occur to me.

Junaid: You have not, then, really traveled to *Baytullah*. How about putting on the *Ihraam* and replacing your usual clothes? When doing that act, did you abandon your undesirable habits and attitudes that had been part of your daily routines?

Haajji: It did not cross my mind.

Junaid: Alas! You did not even put on *Ihraam*. But did you experience the presence of Allah (*subhana wa ta'ala*) while you were standing in 'Arafaat?

Haajji: What do you mean?

Junaid: When you were praying to Allah (*subhana wa ta'ala*) in 'Arafaat, did you feel as if He was right in front of you and you were watching Him?

Haajji: No, that was not how I felt.

Junaid: That means you did not even reach 'Arafaat. I hope you left your worldly desires and aspirations in Muzdalifah.

Haajji: I did not think about it.

Junaid: So, you have not even been to Muzdalifah. How was your *Tawaaf* (circumambulation)? Did you feel overwhelmed by an ardent attraction towards the perfect Majesty of Allah (*subhana wa ta'ala*) during *Tawaaf*?

Haajji: I do not think so.

Junaid: It is, then, as if you have not even performed *Tawaaf*. Perhaps you understood the spirit, wisdom and objective of running between Mounts Safaa and Marwah.

Haajji: Not really.

Junaid: In other words, you have not performed *Sa'y* (running between Safaa and Marwah). Tell me about your sacrificial rites. While slaughtering the animal, did you sacrifice for the love of Allah (*subhana wa ta'ala*) your own lusts and desires?

Haajji: That did not come to my mind.

Junaid: In that case, you have not even offered sacrifice. What about throwing stones at the pillars? When performing that ritual, did you cast away your bad company, evil friends and dirty plans?

Haajji: This did not happen either.

Junaid: Unfortunately, you have not performed *Ramy* (stoning rites) either. You must go back next year and re-perform the Hajj with the sentiments, spirit, and attitude mentioned above so that it can be a simulation of Ibrahim (*alayhi assalaam*)'s experiences, about whom the Holy Qur'aan says in *Soorah Al-Najm*,

"***And Ibrahim who was truly loyal to Allah.***"

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FLASHBACKS

A Ramadan to Remember

Ramadan came and went, much faster than most of us would have liked. Every year Muslims around the world fast from dawn to dusk. Muslim students at the University of Toronto, St. George campus too spent the last week of October and three weeks of November fasting for Allah's *(subhana wa ta'ala)* pleasure.

This year, by the grace of Allah *(subhana wa ta'ala)*, the MSA managed to gather enough in the way of monetary donations to feed the fasting students on campus every weekday of Ramadan! The money came from friends or families of members, individual donors or groups of friends. The various dishes were catered by Tarboosh restaurant and Food911 catering company, and in the last week we had *biryani* from Medina Restaurant!

But the caterers only delivered the food to the location of our *iftar*. What then? I'll tell you: our team of volunteers, 47 in all, helped serve the 180+ people we had attending each and every *iftar*! They set up the prayer and food areas, brought the drinks, plates and cutlery, carried the food, divided and served it and then helped clean up in the end for twenty one days! Many times, the volunteers didn't have their share of drinks at the *iftars*; when the food ran short, it was the volunteers who would skip the meal. All these efforts are very much appreciated by the organizers and *insha'Allah* the reward is fixed for them. May Allah *(subhana wa ta'ala)* give them all their due rewards and more for their efforts (*Ameen*).

The exact number of people who came on any given day remains a mystery – the feeble attempts at counting the number of plates used or the number of drinks taken didn't help too much! There were some shortfalls over the course of the month including food running out, drinks running short, cramped seating and some unfortunate noncompliance with the servers' rules which had to be put in place to ensure equal distribution of food.

All in all, the meals were much appreciated by the fasting, and were a prime example of how much we can accomplish when we work together!

Orphan Sponsorship Update

SWJ welcomed Ramadan with an ambitious goal for the sake of Allah *(Subhana wa ta'ala)*. Good deeds are rewarded seventy times greater than usual in Ramadan, and as narrated by Sahl bin Sa'd, *(Radiya-Allah anhu)*: The Prophet *(Sallallahu alaihi wasallam)* said,

"I and the person who looks after an orphan and provides for him, will be in Paradise like this", putting his index and middle fingers together.

(Sahih Al-Bukhari, Vol. 8 Hadith No.34)

With this, SWJ undertook a project to raise money for the sponsorship of 30 orphans over the 30 days of Ramadan (Ramadan however turned out to be 29 days this year). The money raised would help educate, feed and shelter the sponsored orphans for an entire year. Though people were doubtful that this goal would ever be reached, with Allah's *(subhana wa ta'ala)* Mercy, the Muslim community on and off campus was able to raise enough money for over 40 orphans!! This surpassed our goal tremendously. The orphans sponsored are from eight countries, including Kenya, Kashmir, Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, Afghanistan, Palestine, and Lebanon. We had hoped to sponsor orphans from many more countries, but were unable to do so due to lack of orphan sponsorship organizations in these countries. *Insha'Allah* in time we hope to continue to sponsor these orphans and many more from around the world. *Ameen*!

Alhamdulillah, Allah *(subhana wa ta'ala)* not only rewarded our efforts by helping us exceed our goal, but also helped us get the reward of following the Prophet's *(sallallahu alaihi wasallam) sunnah*. May Allah *(subhana wa ta'ala)* bless all those who contributed to this effort, whether it was in advertising, collecting money, donating, or making *dua* for us to be successful.

Jazakum Allahu Khairan to all of you.

Balancing Religion and Academics

The first seminar of the Academic Affairs Committee was definitely an success. Students from various universities and schools from across the GTA gathered to hear Dr. Yasser Haddara speak on the topic of effectively balancing ones academic and religious responsibilities.

Dr. Yasser Haddara pointed out two main reasons why students don't fare well in academics: they are either a) doing the wrong thing, or b) they are doing it in the wrong way.

To avoid doing the wrong thing, he said you should know what you really want to do in life. He pointed out an incident at his university where a fourth year engineering student approached him and said that he wasn't sure engineering was what he wanted to do. At that point he simply asked the student "What do you want to be when you grow up?"

At first the student smiled thinking it was a joke. But noticing that the professor was serious replied, "I don't know."

Prioritizing is another skill which many students lack. Ask students to divide their tasks into very important things and not-so-important things, and they'll end up putting everything in the very-important list.

In Dr. Haddara's opinion, the best way to deal with this problem is to allot hours per week for each of the top most important things. When all your week's hours are used up, cancel the remaining activities that didn't make the cut; these are the activities that eat up your time and give you little or no benefit in return.

Specialise. The key to specialising is knowing yourself. He said that the Qur'an (9:122) encourages us to specialise in the field that we are most comfortable with.

Learn to say "No!" When someone comes to you and says that you are the only person who can do a certain task and you have no time, say "No!". Dr. Haddara said that by saying "no" you are actually doing a favor

on your friend, because you need to survive to be able to help them out in future!

Setting goals is yet another aspect critical to success. Important decisions in life depend on that one goal. For instance, if there is a solar car project coming up and you are tempted to do it, evaluate your aims. Do you need A+ to go to graduate school? Then forget the project. If, however you aim to work after bachelors, then you can compromise your grade to a "B" and definitely join the project team and gain hands-on experience.

Collective team work is also very important. It teaches you not only various new skills, but helps you delegate tasks (which you should!) and indirectly you help others learn too.

The highlight of the evening was Dr. Haddara's discussion of "*wird*", fixed allotment. According to him, wird is a time management technique that "is one little skill that is a hallmark of Islam...which Muslims have been doing since the time of the Prophet *(salallahu alaihi wasallam)*."

The way the *wird* works is that you block out a certain amount of time periodically, say for studies, and make a point not to do anything else at that time. To make it practical, people should start with doing very small amounts. But he warned "Don't go too far." In his words "A little bit that is continuous is better than a lot that comes in spurts".

Finally, Dr. Haddara reminded everyone that the compulsory acts of worship should not be left at any cost. They are "as important as your meals". On our road to become better Muslims though, he pointed out that we have the benefit of choosing what we are most comfortable with. Some people at the Prophet's *(sallahu alaihi wasallam)* time would pray extra *rakats* and some would fast in regular days, depending on what they found to be the most natural way to communicate with God. An ideal way for a student to excel in his religious duties, he suggested, is by doing community service. He supported this statement by sharing the following points:

i) Obligation to make *Da'wa.*

ii) The Qur'an (3:143) states that God has made mankind a justly balanced nation. From this point, helping in success of our community is also a part of Islam.

iii) The *hadith* "The living draw their sustenance from God: the most beloved to God is the person who serves the needs of the creation" is a further proof that by community service a student can excel in his or her religious duties.

He complemented this argument by saying that all those who attain success started off like us. What sets them apart is that they took initiative and sought out success, instead of waiting for success to come to them.

Dr. Haddara also pointed out that not only can a person do *da'wa*, but he can also BE *da'wa*. Towards the end he said that any permissible act you do and do it with the right *niyyah* (intention), it counts as a good deed. "You like competitive sports? Compete! But make the right intention... *insha'Allah* it will be counted as a good deed."

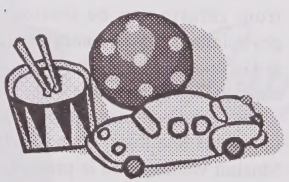
And finally "Be intelligent!"

The Drive to Drive

Alhumdulillah the Ramadan Food, Clothing and Toy Drives were an astounding success. Thanks to the hard work of Co-ordinators Shuaib Ally and Rabiya Morisiya, and the genorisity of hundreds of people on and off campus, MSA St. George surpassed its ambitious goal of 1,200 food items and finished with 1,450! *Masha'Allah*! Those numbers were good enough to top the other MSA's around the GTA and put St. George in a class of its own. The non-perishable donations were split between the Muslim Welfare Centre and the Toronto Daily Bread Food Bank.

The Toy Drive, in conjunction with UofT Mississauga, was *alhumdulillah* also very successful. Under the organization of Abdullah Arain and the coordinators over at UTM the two campuses were able to donate over 500 toys to needy children through the Muslim Welfare Centre.

Meanwhile, the first annual Ramadan Clothing Drive was not to be outdone.



Bundle after bundle of good quality clothing was deposited in the bins throughout campus and as a result, we were able to proudly donate TWO-AND-A- HALF car loads of clothes to GoodWill Toronto. Needless to say, they were thrilled by our efforts.

By the grace of Allah *(subhana wa ta'ala)*, the efforts of our hard-working co-ordinators and volunteers, and the genorisity of the UofT community, the 2003 edition of the Ramadan Drives was unprecendented in its success.

Henna Night & Gift Exchange

Despite the dreaded arrival of exams, the turnout at the Sisterz Eid Gift Exchange and Henna night was very good and those who came out were not disappointed. They deserved the much needed break! There were games, gifts, *henna* adorned hands, delicious sweets, and *masha'Allah*, all the beautiful sisters contributed to a wonderful evening. Most importantly, the event brought forth the opportunity to meet several new sisters who had never attended an MSA-organized event before. The event truly lifted everyone's spirits and truly fulfilled the motive for holding the event, which was serving to help renew and foster sisterhood, by the grace of Allah *(subhana wa ta'ala)*. Towards the end of the evening, Sister Sarah Attia delivered a lovely message–to continue to revive the spirit of Ramadan everyday and to take something, no matter how little, that had helped us become closer to our Creator and practice it with consistency, *insha'Allah*.

B-Ballin' in the Break

During the winter break, a few brothers from the MSA participated in the Golden Key Invitational 3-on-3 basketball tournament. The tournament was organized to raise funds for The Hospital for Sick Children and to collect items for The Daily Bread Food Bank. The team of Eldar Curovic, Mukhtar Shaikh, Amiel Hussein, and Yaseer Shakur showed great poise en route to a second place finish. They played as a unit with solid contributions from everybody: Eldar led the way with great all-around scoring; Mukhtar dominated the low post with strong rebounding and solid interior defence; Amiel displayed smooth ball-handling and scoring skills in the back-court; and Yaseer was solid at the point guard position. The brothers came within one shot of winning the tournament as they lost in overtime by one point! Nevertheless, the tournament was for a noble cause and they were happy to have participated.

From The News Desk..

"Surely, Allah changes not the condition of a people until they change that which is in their hearts."

[Qur'an, 13:12]

By the grace of Allah Almighty *(subhana wa ta'ala)*, a new year has arrived, along with a new term and the fluffy white stuff we all love. It is worthwhile to take a moment to ruminate on the past year and our own spiritual development - but also the ailing health of the Muslim *Ummah*. A reader of the Toronto Star articulated his wish for 2004:

That words like Muslim, Jew, Iraqi, Palestinian, Pakistani, Arab, American, Afghan, bombed, killed, captured, attacked, murdered, held, invaded, controlled, infiltrated, suicide, devastated, buried, mourned, bitter and revenge are used less often in the media throughout the year. (Dec. 31, Letters)

My dear brothers and sisters, it is deplorable to see how the peace-loving religion of our Prophet (*sallAllahu alaihi wasallam*) has been misused to the point that the world 'Muslim' immediately conjures up negative images in the media. Some Muslims have resorted to using westernized versions of their names so as to avoid the stigma that comes with the suspicion of being (God forbid!) 'Muslim.' It is no coincidence that all but one (America) of the countries plagued by strife mentioned above are predominantly Muslim.

It can be hard for Muslims growing up in the West to maintain their identities and beliefs when they are being bombarded left, right and center by these images portraying their religion as innately bloodthirsty and immoral. The average Muslim who only desires to go about his daily life, like anyone else, has suddenly been catapulted to the spotlight, becoming a representative of the faith that has become a favorite topic over dinner tables. Women who decide to wear the *hijab* for personal fulfillment have found it has become a political statement. Instead of being constantly on the defence, what can we do to combat the pollution of our faith?

The Qur'anic verse quoted above gets to the root of the problem: It is not that God ever forsakes those who love Him, but we ourselves must become the change that we wish to see. Only then is it that we can ameliorate our condition. A glance across the globe shows that too many of our fellow Muslims have strayed from the true teachings of Islam, manipulating interpretations of the Qur'an to justify their actions. This is the ultimate test from God, as well as a sign of His supreme mercy: He wants us to discover Islam on our own terms and help our brothers and sisters in faith. And while we are doing so, He is never more than a prayer away. God tells the Holy Prophet Muhammad (*sallAllahu alaihi wasallam*):

When My servants ask thee about Me, say: I am near.

[Qur'an 2:187]

And now on to other news across the Muslim world.

1. 'The veil, my choice'

French president Jacques Chirac has urged parliament to pass a law before the next school year that would prohibit Muslim women from wearing the veil, which he sees as "aggressive." Thousands of people, mainly Muslim women shouting "The veil, my choice," have marched through the streets of Paris to protest what they see as an infringement on their basic rights. Along with the headscarf ban, Chirac wants to give company bosses the right to prohibit religious symbols at the workplace, and pass a law that would prevent Muslim women from refusing to be treated by male physicians. A similar controversy is brewing in Germany, although no definitive action has been taken as of yet.

Rarely does any news item get me as riled up as this one does. As a self-respecting Muslim woman who is proud to wear the *hijab*, I know I speak for all my sisters when I say that dressing modestly, including wearing a head-covering, is a part of my identity that I cherish and don't see myself parting with. The *hijab* cannot be considered on par with other religious symbols such as a cross around one's neck. It is an integral part of a Muslim woman's faith and is supported by verses in the Holy Qur'an. What is Chirac so afraid of? What exactly is it about a piece of cloth on one's head that he finds "aggressive"? Perhaps he should take a trip to Toronto, where we have discovered that pluralism is one of our greatest strengths, and that the 'melting pot' mentality only serves to smother individuality and create resentment. Sheema Khan of CAIR-CAN refers to the move as a type of "colonialism," where Muslim women's own voices are not considered when deciding what is good for them.

At this time, our French sisters need all the prayers we can offer for them as they fight for the right to practice Islam in a tolerant and accepting society.

2. 'We Got Him!'

The capture of Saddam Hussein and his free dental check-up, shave, and pedicure, were flashed countless times across the television screen in the weeks of December. Countless parents are filing lawsuits against CNN for therapy bills as their kids mistook the smoking out of Saddam for the end of Santa Claus.

Jokes aside, the capture became the perfect Christmas gift for President George W. Bush. Accountability for his expedition in Iraq, as well as the economic and human cost of the war for Americans, had started taking a toll on his popularity. The weeks ensuing the capture sent his ratings skyrocketing. The reaction from other parts of the world was mixed, the most surprising perhaps coming from the many Muslims and Arabs who sympathized with Hussein's situation and protested for his humane treatment according to the rights of prisoners of war with regards to the Geneva Convention.

No doubt the capture of Hussein is good news for the many Iraqis he starved, brutalized or systematically killed during the years of his regime. But at the same time, it is important not to let these emotions interfere with our process of rational thinking. Does Saddam's capture bring Bush any closer to the weapons of mass destruction Bush posited as the reason for his invasion? Or does it make the U.S. any

continued on page 24...

Opinions & Analyses

Justice for All

Word is spreading rapidly about what the Canadian Jewish Congress called "a virulently anti-Semitic article" published in *The Miracle*, reportedly a B.C. Muslim newspaper.

Published on Dec. 19, the article laid blame at the feet of "the Jews" for everything from Sept. 11 to the Holocaust. "It isn't Arabs lying about and guilt-tripping us with 'the holocaust' – it is Jews. It wasn't Arabs who caused the Great Depression – it was Jews. It wasn't Arabs who started WWII – it was Jews."

The Jews' list of supposed crimes continues, to include pedophilia, organized crime, militant feminism and "forcing us to allow homosexuals to lead Boy Scout troops."

The allegations are at once so ludicrous that it is difficult to not throw one's hand up in exasperation at a display of such blatant ignorance.

On the other hand, such an article should not be given short shrift; it is noteworthy (newsworthy, I guess) because there are many people who subscribe to such hateful notions.

Edgar Steele, the author of this diatribe, is recognized by the Southern Poverty Law Centre, a U.S. civil rights group, as an anti-Semite and an anti-black racist. Why would the Muslim community associate itself with, or even lend credence to views of someone whose works include *In Defence of Racism*?

Even if we grant the possibility that they were unaware of his background, it is nevertheless truly frightening that the views expressed in his article might resonate with elements of the Muslim community.

It is devastating to find that there are elements within the Muslim community that will support allegations of the same breed. I find that conspiracy theories involving 'the Jews,' Mossad and Sept. 11 continue to abound. Furthermore, notions about the 'Holocaust hoax' and 'the-Jews-control-the-media-therefore-what-is-reported-isn't-true' continue to get much air time as well. While a critical view of mass media is arguably healthy, it is difficult to see how theories of this nature could be classified as anything but anti-Semitic. It is equally difficult to comprehend what could lead to such beliefs. Yet no reason, be it fear, helplessness, or a need for a scapegoat can justify the wielding of such hateful views; there is no reason to continually marginalize or blame one group for the problems of the world, especially when at times it may be our community that may in some sense be culpable.

At a time in history when many are suspicious about Muslims' perception of Jews, such an article is truly disappointing, for it validates such suspicions, and is a setback in building the kind of trust and understanding that shall allow the two respective communities to move forward, despite what may be occurring halfway around the globe.

I laud the Canadian Council on American-Islamic Relations for swiftly condemning such viewpoints by positing that "we stand with other Canadians in denouncing the contents of this hateful and malicious article. "Such commentary is completely at odds with both the letter and spirit of Islamic teaching and merely hinders efforts at interfaith understanding and tolerance."

I hope and pray that other Muslims feel the same way. We are a community that sees ourselves as highly misunderstood, continually facing discriminatory treatment and racism and a preponderance of hate crime following Sept. 11. How we could possibly turn a blind eye and at times participate in such caricatures against another culture/religious group is as counterintuitive as it is despicable.

There really is nothing to equivocate about; if such an article were published with Muslims as the target, we would not label it "free speech," as chief editor Nusrat Hussain would mind-numbingly like it to be depicted, but hate crime. The notions of justice we purport to uphold demand that our treatment of this article, regardless of whom it is about, not be otherwise.

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Opinions & Analyses

On The Merit of the *Hijab* or Head Scarf and its Potential Benefits to Western Society

"Do your parents force you to wear that?" asks my young charge, as we colour-in pictures of fruits and balloons. "No," I reply, "My parents never force me to do anything I don't want to do. I'd never allow it."

As time passes and the wounds of 9/11 heal, people once again are able to look at me, a Muslim woman, without hatred and perhaps a kind smile as we go about our daily lives, working, studying, and volunteering for the common good of our society. I wish that I could share with them my deeper feelings, especially when they look at me with concern for my personal freedom or physical safety from that domineering father or husband they think I might have. The one who, so obviously, compels me to dress the way I do. I flash a congenial smile, trying to convey to them that is nowhere near reality.

I have chosen. I bear witness before God, and before anyone who may read this that I have made an independent, conscious decision to do what I believe God has advised me to do. Not because of what my parents, elders, religious leaders or anyone else thinks. I denounce the notion that the *hijab* is an institution evolved among a group of narrow-minded, lustful men sitting around a campfire, within a few metres of their cave, whose sole plan is to safeguard themselves from the evils of the weaker sex. To the delight of feminists, the *hijab* might even be closer to implying the opposite — that men are the weaker ones. But Islam allows no such comparisons, recognizing differences while placing both on a truly equitable playing field.

The *hijab* is modesty. Pure as it is simple. I have been told that it is possible to wear hijab without covering one's head. And I have seen this in practice both by Muslim and non-Muslim women and men. But for many, walking the entire mile and wearing a headscarf is akin to not only following God's command, but glorifying His wisdom for having shown us the best way to protect ourselves and our loved ones, both female and male, from harm. And for many, wearing the *hijab* makes the practice of Islam much easier, since it exemplifies to the public the beliefs held within.

When I wear *hijab*, I am a representative of Islam. It reminds me I must continually struggle to bear witness to and demonstrate its excellence as a religion and way of life through each of my words and actions.

I will present below only one reason (by no means the best or the only reason, but one that personally appeals to my conscience), which I believe is the most potent, that *hijab* should not only be tolerated, but embraced and respected in modern societies for the immeasurable benefits it brings.

Reading about the recent atrocities of Holly Jones (who was literally my neighbour showing how close to home these incidents are) and Cecilia Zhang, both of whom were victims of abduction and likely sexual assault, I couldn't help but be moved by the heart-breaking complacency and silence of Canadians in the face of these crimes. Neither can I forget little Kayla Clauduze, or the countless other children, girls and boys who are the victims of abuse that is most likely induced (unknowingly) by people who condemn such crimes. These incidents rattle our communities with anger, fear and grief, if only until we are able to forget about them. There is so much unused potential that each and every person in society can contribute to the prevention of such atrocities.

Islam offers a cutting-edge solution designed to prevent our brothers in humanity from harming themselves or any of our sisters in humanity, and vice versa. It was revealed by God over 1400 years ago and it follows the same logic and wisdom that mothers have taught their children for centuries: "Out of sight, out of mind." Psychological research has shown that when a desirable object (for example a chocolate cake) is placed before the eyes of a test subject and they are told they cannot have it until a certain time elapses, the subject will deliberately block the object from his or her sight. They will think of something else, look away, discuss another issue. All this to avoid thinking of the forbidden object. By protecting our sight, we have veritably eliminated the harm to our minds. Clearly there is merit in shielding the eyes from things that are harmful to one's morality. By dressing modestly, in essence, embracing *hijab*, men and women in Canada can take the matter into their own hands. *Hijab* of the body is the simplest and most straightforward means of achieving this end.

Ardent feminists and those who are excessively liberal will claim it is solely the responsibility of individuals to 'control' themselves in daily situations where lustful feelings may be aroused by the manner of dress of those around them. I disagree, since I know that even the most self-restrained and morally upstanding person can succumb to transient errors of judgment and moments of weakness. It is time for these women to own up to their role in the demise of these innocents, both female and male, who are unable to defend themselves as a grown person is able to. The exact same edict applies to men who my be prone to dressing in a provocative manner and who, knowingly or not, induce similar irresolvable feelings in the women around them. Men are advised as vehemently in the Qur'an and through the example of the Sunnah to dress modestly – so there can be no double standard.

By any moral or legal assessment, sex-offenders are psychologically and emotionally disturbed individuals whose crimes are unjustifiable. Yet, have we stopped to consider what breeds such horrific acts of abduction, rape, assault, and murder, in these deranged criminals? One could argue that the sexual nature of our culture, naturally feeds sexual desire. Our culture is rampant with all that arouses most males - advertisements of women in provocative clothing, large numbers of women dressed to attract men, the sexual content and erotic nature of much of television, movies, and the internet. All of these contribute at some level to the distorted, unfulfilled fantasies of sex-offenders, who reach a point where they can no longer control themselves and

subsequently commit such atrocious crimes. Thus we must take a serious look at the morals and values our culture expresses, as well as the dangerous proportion of

desires and crimes it evokes, if we wish to prevent tragic cases like Holly's.**

If, by wearing *hijab*, I prevent even one of the following three events, I will have accomplished my goal: (1) the provocation of a man who may be prone to immoral acts to the point where he feels the need to take advantage of me or another (innocent and likely defenseless) female, (2) the distraction of any happily married man from the sincere devotion to his wife, (3) the misguidance of a person, who is otherwise pure at heart, by catching them off-guard with the charm of any feminine endowments.

If I knew that the way I had dressed provoked any man (or woman, in the context of modern society) who was unable to take advantage of me due to my size, strength and ability to defend myself, and in their frustration, subsequently, attacked and harmed a young child, there would be no end to the shame and disgrace I would feel for having, if not solely, caused then merely to have catalyzed the painful fate of this innocent being.

By making the decision to wear *hijab* a woman has taken control of her life. She is preventing herself from being seen as an object without a mind, protecting the men around her from faltering towards their inner weaknesses, and most importantly, protecting the innocent children who are the ultimate victims of a diseased social framework. The exact same applies to men. This point cannot be overemphasized, and the only thing that prevents me from repeating each point above with a "he", is my limited space.

The Qur'an teaches us in many places to:

"Enjoin what is good and wholesome and forbid what is wrong and unwholesome".

Further, we are told that

"husbands and wives are like protective garments or coverings for one another"

[Qur'an, 2:187]

showing that both men and women have the responsibility to protect themselves and each other from falling into ruin due to lack of moral behaviour. Safeguarding those around us means firstly, taking responsibility for ourselves, and secondly, by advising those who are near to us, with patience and care, to do the same.

When I wear *hijab* I do so not only for my personal benefit and for the love of my Creator, but for the benefit of the rest of society because I love and value them and would not want anyone of them harmed by a selfish mistake I had made.

It is this selfsame love and goodwill Muslim women feel when wearing the *hijab* in the Canadian society that make the denial of women's rights to wear it in France utterly indefensible. French Muslim women's love for their country is made manifest by their continued will to wear *hijab* in the face of their leaders' blatant ignorance and xenophobia, disguised as secular dogma. Chirac's ban of the *hijab* and labelling it as 'ostentatious' and an 'aggression' couldn't be further from the truth. It is only one of the excellent solutions, a choice that Islam offers to the West, while not compelling or impeding anyone else's free will.

The worst thing about this *hijab* ban is the notion that any human being has the right to dictate the way another should dress and/or behave. The only Being who has the right to do so is God, who Himself, has given us the freedom either to do as He asks, or to toss His guidance aside. It is through choosing to submit to God, not blindly, but after having contemplated everything with a clear and open conscience, that the believer demonstrates sincere gratitude for the freedom and mercy that has been bestowed upon her/him.

This struggle against the will of those who glamorize the superficial for their own personal benefit (without consideration of the true costs to society), is the real test to determine whether we are worthy of God's favour. As Muslims of the West we must continually strive for justice in all realms and use our status as full, patriotic citizens to improve our environment for the benefit of all of society. And to remind one another that freedom (although it is not available in many Muslim and non-Muslim societies around the world) is a God-given right, and a cornerstone of the very democracy which our dissuaders claim to live by.

***The author would like to express her gratitude to Nosheen Mian for lending her assistance and excellent insight on this important issue.*

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Reviving the Islamic Spirit Conference 2004

Lessons in humanity, peace and progress

The first weekend of the new year was quite eventful for many Muslims in the GTA and across North America. The 2nd 'Reviving the Islamic Spirit Conference'" organized by youth across the GTA" took place on January 2 - 4, 2004 and was indeed 'A Unique Youth Effort', as the motto of the conference claims. Sponsored by COMO (Coalition of Muslim Organizations) and Maple Lodge Farms, the conference was a huge success, attracting close to 10,000 participants (*masha'Allah*). Not enough credit can be given to the organizers for their excellent planning and execution of every stage of the conference from the invitation and reception of the speakers, the promotion of the conference, website updates right down to seating and prayer arrangements as well as the organization of a press conference to address the media.

The conference convened with the Friday prayers and an inspiring *khutbah* given by Dr. Tariq Suwaidan, a renowned author and speaker on 'change' according to Islam. He spoke regarding the characteristics that should be developed by every Muslim. It is not enough to focus on spiritual development, which is undoubtedly an essential aspect of our lives. In addition, we must also focus on our intellectual and physical sides in order to be completely successful as Muslims. Dr. Suwaidan also stressed that it is imperative that we be sincere in our dealings with other people, whether they are Muslim or not.

Among the politicians and activists that attended were Comm. Giuliano Zaccerdelli, Chief Julian Fantino, Mayor David Miller and Caroyln Parrish. They all expressed their solidarity and support for the Muslim community. In addition, they encouraged Muslims to get more involved with the community at large.

There were a variety of excellent speakers this year. To me, the conference was like a 3-day crash course on spiritual enlightenment. All the speakers had this amazing ability, *subhan'Allah*, to keep the audience's minds tuned in to their "*da'wah* wavelength", so to speak. There were also a variety of themes this year, but they all underlined the need for change of the Muslim *ummah* – spiritual, social, and national change; change in our behaviour towards non-Muslims and people who might not follow Islam exactly the way we do; change in attitude from an 'all bad things come to an end' to an 'all good things have a beginning'; PRACTICAL application of Islam in ALL aspects of our lives with an **emphasis on tolerance, mercy, and compassion for all**. Only after focusing on this goal can we hope to replace all the stresses in our lives with knowledge and peace.

Every speaker had something to say to drive this point home. Dr. Tareq Suwaidan gave a 3-part lecture series over the three days in which he outlined practical ideas to achieve personal, organizational and national change as Muslims. Quoting Einstein's adage, **"Naivety is to do the same things the same way and expect different results"**, he emphasized that to change our present state in the world we have to correct fate and not blame it. In order to achieve this, we need to be self-reliant to an extent, but at the same time realize that we are not self-sufficient and that we live as families and communities. Therefore, we must work with each other cohesively in order to accomplish our individual goals. **Listening** to others attentively and with an open mind, **exercising conscious control over our actions**, and **being merciful** 24/7 are some of the points that he outlined in order to be successful in our relationships with others. According to Dr. Suwaidan, one has to establish specific goals AND a plan to reach those goals in order to be truly successful. **We need to chalk out projects, and then set out to achieve our goals in a realistic fashion, one step at a time.** On the topic of success at a national level, he pointed out that a civilization without justice, faith, and ethics is bound to collapse and hence before looking at strengthening economic, technological, and military factors, we need to effect change in the attitude of the masses and leaders. One practical suggestion for this was the building of Muslim youth centers, leadership camps as well as institutions for the gifted and talented. With his use of examples from real-life encounters and his practical guidelines, Dr. Suwaidan outlined that true happiness could be attained by the Muslim *ummah* by being successful as individuals, in our relation with others, and most importantly in our relation with Allah (*subhana wa ta'ala*).

William Baker, who is a well-traveled Christian theologian and Biblical archaeologist, gave an inspiring talk (entitled 'More in Common than you think') emphasizing that now more than ever Muslims need to live by their religion and work together with everyone in the community, regardless of faith. Only then will others appreciate Islam and Muslims for what they truly stand for. **Muslims cannot afford to incorporate the cultural baggage into their beliefs anymore.** Quoting numerous *ayaat* from the Qur'an, he explained that Allah (*subhana wa ta'ala*) still rules the world and that men are only there according to His Will and that He is STILL in charge. Therefore, we must not easily be disheartened by what people think or say or do to us. Rather, **we should walk the talk and set good examples** because Islam is a gift to humanity and it is through our example that the west can learn about family, sacred marriages, uprightness, and ethical values. Dr. Munir El-Kassem added to this topic by saying that if we are to overcome our weaknesses then we need to put aside our biases and pre-conceived notions and use the diversity of the world around us to our advantage by working with others in the community and learning from them. He stressed that we should use the differences to unify rather than divide ourselves. He also pointed out that Allah (*subhana wa ta'ala*) has made everyone different and if someone within our own community, for example, is at a lower level of *taqwa* (consciousness of God) than we are, then we should not shun them. People climb up the ladder of Islamic knowledge and *taqwa* step by step, so rather than discouraging them, we should be welcoming and encouraging. We need to **reach out, live with everyone AS Muslims and not portray Islam as a religion of the elite but as a practical message of peace for the world**

Shaikh Abdullah Adhami, a scholar of Islam from Syria and a student of Islamic

knowledge since the age of 8, underlined the significance of **handling ourselves with humility and civility no matter where we are** and the need to have genuine affinity with rest of *ummah* and justice and kindness in our dealing with others. Allah's (*subhana wa ta'ala*) mercy is something that is vast, unlimited and incomprehensible and therefore we must pray to Him to shower this mercy on everyone and not just our individual selves.

Imam Zaid Shakir, who is currently teaching at the Zaytuna Institute for Islamic Sciences, addressed many of the issues affecting youth directly and advised them to look to Allah (*subhana wa ta'ala*) as the source of all strength and power, not brand labels and other material things. Feelings such as jealousy should be avoided for they are a sign of rejection of Allah's (*subhana wa ta'ala*) blessings. We need to rejoice in each other's blessings and share our happiness, for the blessing of each Muslim is the blessing of the *ummah*. Imam Zaid also talked about leading lives with a vision of service to humanity and not service to self - "**Muslims should be wise, discerning and not bags of cotton – empty and full of fluff.**"

Tariq Ramadan, a philosopher and activist coming from a long line of Islamic scholars, was also a speaker at the conference. His statements were very precise, but made a lot of sense. He pointed out that today many Muslims tend to act as minority citizens, who are always pushed into explaining and justifying what Islam is all about. This kind of attitude leads to either totally accepting western values or totally rejecting them. We need to stop being defensive and adopt a proactive attitude. **When we speak about Islam, we should not speak as if we are different**. We are exactly like any other society. Islam stands for good, spreading peace and humanity, giving food and being connected with our families. These are all universal values and thus, we need to look at and talk about Islam as a human teaching.

Shaikh Mokhtar Maghroui, a central *Shura* member of the Islamic Society of North America, highlighted the role of the heart (*qalb*) in strengthening the *taqwa* of the believer. The brain is an organ that takes in data and processes it, but **the heart is what interprets reality and understands it according to this data**. It is, therefore, **important to condition the heart with the *zikr* of Allah** (*subhana wa ta'ala*). The *zikr* should not be limited to the tongue; the heart and the tongue should be aligned. The heart should feel what the tongue says and the tongue should say what the heart feels. That is why it so important to always speak the truth. Lying, hypocrisy, arrogance, and ignorance are all factors that make the heart sick. External *fiqh* without the involvement of the heart causes the heart to die. According to Shaikh Mokhtar, true happiness is happiness of the heart and joy of spirit (and truly, this was really apparent on his face – he had an immense look of peace on his face and in his voice and was constantly smiling).

"Naivety is to do the same things the same way and expect different results"

-Einstein

Shaikh Hamza Yusuf – well this is one scholar who needs no introduction. The first American lecturer to teach in Morocco's prestigious and oldest University, the Kairoiuin in Fes and the founder of the Zaytuna Institute, he has translated into modern English several classical Arabic traditional texts and poems. His talks were very educational and enlightening. Focusing on the legacy of Islam to human civilization and the miracles of the Qur'an, his purpose was to revive our pride in the Islamic culture and heritage and to revive the Islamic spirit to discover and seek knowledge that was once the foundation of great Islamic civilizations. At the same time, he explained that Allah (*subhana wa ta'ala*) declares the whole of humanity as *Banu* Adam (children of Adam); hence, our source is unified. Also, we are all indebted to one another because we are all interconnected in a complex network of interdependence. We cannot tell if the thread for the shirt we are wearing was supplied by the man walking on the street in front of us, so we should not tend to be judgmental in our nature. One of the touching insights that he provided was that **noble people do good to everyone. They help people that have fallen, up; they don't shove them down further or remind them of their fall**. Regarding miracles of the Qur'an, he indicated that the Qur'an was inimitable primarily because, rhetorically, every verse is perfect (*subhan'Allah*). That is, there is no verse that can be framed in a better way while preserving its meaning. Also, when one studies the classical Arabic language deeply, one has no choice but to conclude that the Arabic language cannot have been but divinely revealed and is not something that arose by conventional means. He gave several examples of this, one of which I will elaborate on here. Let's take the word '*gharika*', which means to drown. The letter 'gh' is related to unseen things, the letter 'ra' is related to continuity and the letter 'ka' is related to cutting off or ending. So if we analyse the meaning of the whole word according to the individual letters, we find something amazing – the meaning of the individual letters add up to the meaning of the whole word! When a person begins to drown, he starts to 'disappear' from the surface or become unseen ('gh' – beginning of the word), then he 'continues' to sink further and further into the water ('ra' – middle of the word) and then finally you cannot see anything indicative of the person on the surface, i.e., the person sinks completely ('ka' – end of the word). *Subhan'Allah*!

Ustad Amr El-Khaled was given a resounding welcome by the audience, Egyptian style! He humbly thanked the audience for their warmth, but said that he hoped that the attention would not go against him on the Day of Judgement. He gave his speeches in Arabic, which was a blessing for Arabic speakers, but people like me, who know only 'shoya, shoya' Arabic, had to rely on the text translation of the speech. Nevertheless, it was nice to hear the *khutbah* given in Arabic in an Egyptian accent (so *hijab* became *higab*). The Ustad emphasized that we need to go back to *Surah Fatiha* and apply it as we are supposed to, only then can we change our current state. Specifically, he mentioned that we need to go back to *'Iyya ka na'budu wa iyya ka nasta'een'* which is translated as '*Thee (Allah) alone do we worship and Thee alone do we ask for help'*. We need to BE good believers and we need to seek Allah's help in ALL aspects of life. He emphasized the need for making contributions so that the Muslim world will be viewed as an asset, or rather a necessity as opposed to a liability by the rest of the world. He pointed out that there is a need

continued on page 12...

for intellectual production; **it is not enough to pray and fast - these are the inputs in our lives, but where are our outputs?** Quoting the Qur'an, he said that (paraphrasing) there is no one who gets an idea and works hard for it except that it will bear fruit. Also, both isolating ourselves from the western society and assimilating ourselves into it are undesirable. We need to strike a BALANCE in our attitude and behaviour.

The audience was also treated to a video address by Dr. Jamal Badawi, who could unfortunately not make it to the conference this year to directly address the audience.

It seems impossible to do justice to all the speakers in the allotted space, but each one of the speakers shared their deep knowledge through valuable examples and insights. To respect these scholars is to take their advice to heart and apply it in our lives. Because of the unfortunate lack of space, I shall briefly mention the other speakers, all of whom I highly regard and admire and learnt a lot from at the conference. They include Qari Abdul Rasheed Brown who inspired and enlightened everyone with his impeccable Qur'anic recitation (*masha'Allah*). Shaykh Abdullah Hakim Quick highlighted the importance of patience and steadfastness in an era of trials and tribulations and also spoke about guidelines for moving ahead successfully as a community in a global village. Sr. Aminah Assilmi illustrated how, through simply maintaining our Muslim identity and by living Islam, we can portray Islam as a way of life with a purpose and one that encourages the struggle for goodness in every place, at all times, and with everyone. Br. Parvez Naseem talked about how the exclusion of women from our public spaces, mainly mosques and centers is having a negative impact on our community and that the time has come for change. Ustad Muhammad Alshareef gave an insightful lecture on the role of *Adab* in our personal as well as collective lives as Muslims. Finally, Imam Zia Ullah Khan, who has a unique ability to capture the attention of the young and 'not-so-young' through both humorous and inspiring examples, came across effectively to the audience on topics such as the 'Character of a Believer' and 'The *Sunnah* in the Modern World'.

To support the conference and for more details on the conference and the speakers, please go to www.revivingtheislamicspirit.com. Information on audio/video tapes on the conference can also be obtained from the above website or go to www.al-huda.ca. I would highly recommend purchasing the tapes on the conference because I think that the means to one's *taqwa* is worth more than anything.

It was quite heart-warming to see Muslims gathering together to seek knowledge for Allah's (*subhana wa ta'ala*) sake and to earn His mercy. *Alhamdulillah*, the experience of sharing the motivation of spirit, uniting in prayer and *du'a* with fellow muslims was quite enlightening.

All in all if the conference was able to achieve what it set out to accomplish which is the Revival of the Islamic Spirit, then *insha'Allah*, the organizers, the speakers, the attendees, the volunteers and all those involved directly and indirectly will be given the *ajar* from Allah (*subhana wa ta'ala*). May He give us all *taufiq* and help us to become more merciful and patient for His sake and strengthen us with *Iman* as well as the '*Ilm* of *deen* and *duniya*, *ameen*.

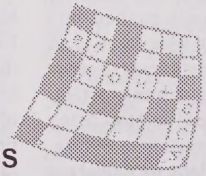
Abida Raouf, OT2 Engineering
University of Toronto (St. George)

SIGN-UP FOR MSA-L!

Would you like to know about MSA events?
Want to know when & where Jumu'ah might be held on campus?
Don't want to miss important announcements?

Visit our website at www.utoronto.ca/muslim for details on how to sign-up for the MSA e-mail listserve!

SOLUTIONS to Crossword from pg 32:

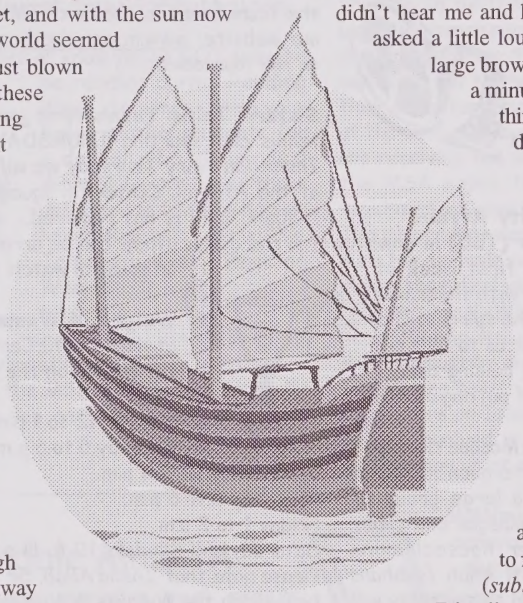


ACROSS
1. Nas
5. fath
6. kafiroon
9. fatiha
10. ishmael
12. judi
13. ridhwan
15. malik
16. ishaq
19. falaq
20. kahf
22. baqarah

DOWN
2. adam
3. rajab
4. qiyamah
7. nuh
8. gabriel
10. izrail
11. mulk
14. lahab
17. alaq
18. taubah
21. fitr

The Lost Companions

A wide ocean, stretching for miles lay before me. I am sitting on the stoned ground, feeling pain in my body everywhere. What have these people done? Where did they go? They had deserted me, and said: "I was not born to be their friend". I looked at the wide ocean that lay before me. There was a ship, a wooden ship, floating away on the dark-colored sea. The sun had just set, and with the sun now gone, almost all the light of the world seemed taken away as if a lantern had just blown out. And I kept wondering why these people had gone back to the starting point, home, back to the ignorant lifestyle. They could've led the life of a pure muslim – a muslim who was strong at heart and strong in faith.



I stood up, my hands in my pockets and looked towards the sky with sadness, as if I were looking for guidance. And then I looked around me. It was all dark and I could barely make out the shapes of the objects around me. I was in a garden, full of dried leaves, and bushes that were uneven. There was almost no way I could walk through this mess except for the single pathway that I was upon.

Then, suddenly, I saw a little flame that seemed to be from a candle around the bend, on the pathway, past the bushes. Full of curiosity I walked slowly, my hands held together, towards the light that seemed so nearby. I walked around the bend and yet, there seemed another bend that I had to walk past and another. What madness! I thought. Where is this pure light that seems to get closer at every step I take? Where…where could it be?

And soon I was getting so close to this mysterious light that it almost blinded me. Oh, it was so bright indeed. I was mesmerized.

Then I heard a melody, but not like any other melody that I've heard. At first, I couldn't make out the words because I was just trying to listen to the beautiful tune or rather tone. I don't know how to describe it, it was so beautiful, so pure, just like the light. The words were hard to hear but they got louder and seemed to be: "He is Great. He is your Creator. He is Great. He is Most Merciful." And it went on and on and on, repeating these wonderful, but simple statements.

Then I whispered out loud, fearing that I might produce a defect in the chanting. "Who is it? Who is this person that you call The Greatest, The Most Merciful?" Then suddenly the melody stopped. And as suddenly as the melody had started, the garden around me disappeared. I was sitting on a white chair on a white surface, with white surroundings. And on a white chair sat a small person engrossed in the reading of the book. This person was covered from top to toe and seemed so humble and pure in appearance. I tried to get a look of her face, but couldn't. "Who are you?" I whispered. But she didn't hear me and kept on reading. "Who are you?" I asked a little louder. She looked up at me with her large brown eyes and said softly: "Please, wait a minute. I'll be right there." And I waited, thinking: What am I doing here? How did I get here? And will I ever be free from this white-washed place?

Then she looked up, closed her book, stood up and walked towards me. She took the chair beside me. She folded her hands on top of each other ever so gently and said: "Dear child, I do not know you, but the reason why you are here is so that I may explain to you one important fact of life. Never give up. Allah (*subhana wa ta'ala)* is Great and Most Merciful. He Forgives His true servants if they ask for forgiveness truly. Never hope to find perfect friends in your life. Allah (*subhana wa ta'ala)* is the only 'Best Friend' as you call it. And never be satisfied when you tell anyone anything about yourself for they will never keep it to themselves. That is the human nature. And Allah (*subhana wa ta'ala)* guides those of whom He wishes so thank Him for the guidance He has bestowed upon you. Thank Him for everything you have as a part of yourself [personality] and everything that is given to you materialistically. This is all I will say to you. From hereon, it is your wish whether you would like to use this advice or not. May Allah *(subhanahu wa ta'ala*) Guide you." Then she moved her hands over my eyes, closing them and when I opened them I was standing on the edge of the ocean again. And I could still see the wooden ship moving away. But now all around me the garden was beautiful, full of roses, flowers, trees and beautifully-cut shrubs. There was light everywhere, even though the lantern, the sun was not present.

What does it mean, I thought. And all of a sudden I realized it doesn't matter what others do, it doesn't matter if the sun has set, it doesn't matter if my surroundings are ugly. What really matters is what's inside my heart and that is the key to success, to all the beauty in the whole world. And that can make the whole world beautiful around you even though others might not think so themselves.

Written by 'Noor Syed'

The UTSG Winter Blitz

Chechnya Lecture and Film Screening-Our sisters and brothers in Chechnya have their rights violated each day. In order to help us gain an understanding about the situation there, Student's for World Justice is holding a lecture and film screening concerning history and current injustices committed in Chechnya. Speaker Br. Nafees Shams has experienced the turmoil first hand, and has his own free-lance videos to better help us understand the struggles.

Where: Bahen 1130
When: January 22nd, 2004
Time: 6-9pm
Make sure you have time in your schedule for this event - you won't want to miss it!

Upcoming Events for Community Affairs:

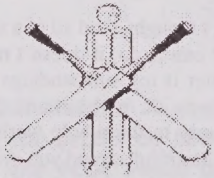
Visit to local Children's Shelter (TBD) in downtown Toronto- Come join us in the first week of February as we strive to connect with those less fortunate than us in our city in the spirit of Eid. This will be a good opportunity for us to take out some time and spend an evening helping others and experience the satisfaction of putting a smile on a child's face.

Mid-March Mosque Cleanup-The Mosque cleanup will take part on a weekend afternoon in March *inshAllah*, where we will take a large group of brothers and sisters to a local mosque and clean, paint and perform some other housecleaning activities. Sustaining the House of Allah *(subhana wa ta'ala)* is vitally important, and this activity will prove to be both essential and fun *inshAllah*!

Spring - Social Justice Speaker Series Part 2- After last years first annual Social Justice Series on Homelessness, we hope to carry on the tradition and make this years lecture even bigger and better inshAllah. Stay tuned to MSA-L for more details.

As in all MSA events, the above can only be a pipe dream without your help and support, brothers and sisters! We need coordinators, organizers and volunteers for all of them and would very much appreciate your feedback. To sign up or for more information please email msa_comm@yahoo.ca .

Cricket Tournament- The MSA Cricket Board is organizing a huge cricket tournament on Saturday,



January 17th 2004 at the Unity Cricket and Sports Complex (www.unitycricket.com). Teams from UTSG, UTM, UTSC, York, and Ryerson will be competing *inshAllah*, with four teams from UTSG and one team from each of the other campuses. There will be two sets of four teams. After group matches, the top two teams will qualify for semi-finals and the winners will procede to the finals to determine the ultimate winner *inshAllah*.

The following are the sponsors of the tournament: TCS Express Canada, Popeyes Chicken & Biscuits Restaurant (at 267 College St), Dufferin Mazda and Lahore Biryani House. Watch out for the results of the tournament in the next TMV issue. Please visit our website: www.msacricketboard.tk for updates on the tournament.

Sisters' Table Tennis-come join the sisters' table tennis club starting THURSDAY JANUARY 15th. *InshAllah* every Thursday we will meet for an hour at the Athletic Center (in squash courts 1 & 2) at 5:30pm. Skill is not required... we are playing for fun and competitions can be arranged. Come to play or come to watch!

Weights 4 Women-The weight room at the Athletic Center is sectioned off for women on the following days and times:

Monday 12 to 1 p.m.,
Tuesday 5 to 6 p.m. (with Sr. Sleema)
Wednesday 12 to 1 p.m.
Thursday 5 to 6 p.m.
Friday 1 to 2 p.m.
Saturday and Sundays 10 to 11 a.m.

Please note that *Insha'Allah*, Sr Sleema Chisty will be running the Weights 4 Women program this term every Tuesday at 5 p.m. There will be a break for *salat* at the AC for the first 6 weeks.

There is a female instructor on duty who will be happy to provide you with an introduction and tour to the equipment. Please sign up at the AC office for an orientation. This is how they know this service is being used and thus valuable for future students. An instructor assured me that the AC employees have females cover these shifts. However, on rare occasions (due to illness, for example) there may be a male staff on duty if they are unable to find a female to cover the shift. See you there!

Sister's Swimming-On Fridays in the 25 yd AC pool, from 9:45 a.m. to 11:45 a.m. recreation swimming is being held for women. Since access from the change room to the pool is through public (co-ed) space, an exception has been made to the rule of showering before entering the pool. This makes the swim time more accessible to Muslim women who choose to cover. The windows to the pool are fully covered. Please dress comfortably. Please note that the swimming takes place in the small 25yd pool, not the large one with the gallery and viewing area.

UPCOMING

EVENTS

Brother's Table-tennis Tournament-We know that many of the bros indulge in many hours of table tennis weekly. It's about time we make it a bit interesting: put a little competition into it, some prizes....also known as the MSA Table-tennis tournament 2004! Start off your reading week with the TT tourney. Brothers of all skill levels are welcome. Go home being the MSA TT CHAMPION! And, if not, having the statisfaction of spending some good time with the brothers should do! Details will follow closer to the tournament date. For more info, e-mail br. Mamun at mamun45@hotmail.com.

Annual Ski Trip-We all know you're NOT going to be *reading* during Reading Week. So why not join your fellow Muslim students for a day on the ski slopes! What?? You are one of those unfortunate few who haven't heard about the Annual Ski Trip held every Reading Week!!!!

tsk tsk...

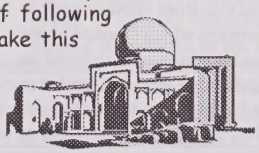
You've got to keep checking http://www.utoronto.ca/muslim/mainevents.htm for updates...*and* read the MSA emails more carefully from now on! See you on the slopes... or in the ditch:p!

The Erindale MaSalA

Note: This column contains real events organized by the Erindale MSA, some of which have been enhanced with fictional details. Check out http://uoftmsa.com/ **for more details on these and other events.**

Ski trip a.k.a. *Halal* slip-a-thon-Earmuff those *hijabs* and tuck in those beards, the MSA is hitting the slopes! Enjoy some *halal* fun in the sun where everyone will be dressed like Muslims!!! No experience is necessary; you can slip and fall on baby slopes where most of your brothers and sisters will be anyway! Check the Erindale **MaSalA** web site for more details.

Islamic Awareness Week-This year IAW will be aimed at educating both Muslims and non-Muslims about different aspects of Islam and will be held during the last week of February. Volunteers are encouraged join one of following committees and help make this event a success.

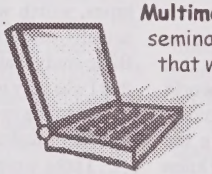


Islamic History Day-. Come learn about your roots (not the receding hairline). Delve into the tribulations and triumphs of the life of the Prophet Muhammad (*sallAllahu alaihi wasallam*), the great Islamic Empires and the spread of knowledge that have decorated the pages of history. Anyone with courses in Islamic history or just having a general interest in these topics will find this project both challenging and rewarding.

Gender Equity in Islam-This year the MSA hopes to dispel the myths of Islam's cruel and harsh treatment of Muslim men. That's right, most Muslim men are not forced to cover half their faces by growing beards, they do so by their own free will! Moreover, just because women receive the same blessings for their prayers at home that men can only achieve after venturing out to the mosque, and women can keep all their inheritance to themselves and that heaven lies at the feet of the mother, doesn't mean men in Islam are receiving the short end of the straw. No sir-e, the MSA hopes to educate everyone on Islam's teachings of equity amongst males and females. Though gender roles are not equal, they are equitable. Men for example can give Friday sermons, and that makes them feel very happy.

Life and Death-What have you done to prepare for death? Being one of few certainties in life, we as Muslims must be prepared to deal with the death of those close to us. This event will educate brothers and sisters on Islamic funeral procedures.

To get involved in any of the week's committees, please email us at executives@uoftmsa.com



Multimedia Production Seminar-Our last seminar was a huge success, and now that we actually know what we're doing, the MSA will be holding its second Multimedia seminar. The seminar will cover topics such as how to use digital cameras, types of software to edit movies, importing videos to the computer and more. All those interested are encouraged to bring their video or digital cameras. No experience is necessary. If this event is successful, the MSA hopes to produce an Islamic animated version of Finding Nemo entitled, "Finding Abdul-Dhul-Jalal -Wal-Ikram Ibn Batinudddin Choudry" based on the real search for a frosh that got lost in Erindale's forest during an MSA orientation 3 years ago. The search continues...so don't forget to order your advanced copy today!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

Sisters Tea Party-For sisters who don't know how to cook, or couldn't be bothered to, the sisters tea party is the place for you! Check out our web site for more details.

If you haven't had a taste of any Erindale **MaSalA** events yet, you don't know what you are missing!

Ayesha Sharieff and Sameem Hafeez
University of Toronto (Erindale)

Journey to Islam

...a reminder of the inherent beauty in our religion.

In the name of God, The Most Benificent, The All Merciful

I have been asked to write a piece for TMV detailing my reversion to Islam. Fortunately I have been asked to keep it "down to earth" since that is exactly what my personal story of coming to Islam is. It is not exciting in the least and considerably less dramatic than the other stories I have read in which people describe how they came to embrace Islam. Perhaps this is a good thing since my story can show that the process of coming to Islam is not necessarily what one might expect and it was certainly not what I expected.

I would say that for the first 18 years of my life I had no knowledge of Islam. I grew up in Fort McMurray, which is home to the northern most mosque in the world although I had no contact with it or its congregants. I suppose that I did have some experience of Islam through seeing images of various conflicts around the world, most notably coverage of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict on 60 minutes. However, this experience was neither positive nor negative. I just thought that there seemed to be some parts of the world which were always in conflict and I didn't bother to judge the participants in the conflict. In fact, I don't even know if I knew they had different religions. It was not until later in life that I actually grasped the fact that people do adhere to different systems of belief. This brings me to my first real contact with Islam.

I did my first year of undergraduate studies in Fort McMurray and it was there that I met a Muslim through an old friend with whom I had not spoken since junior high. I cannot say that this first encounter was particularly noteworthy since I was simply introduced to Bober, without actually knowing that he was Muslim. However, as we got to know each other, the topic of religion did eventually come up. When I think back to these events, which took place between five and six years ago, they actually seem quite strange. Although I was quite ignorant about Islam as I said, I nevertheless took it upon myself to judge Islam quite harshly, trying the patience of my companion Bober, who has since become one of my closest friends and brothers. I seemed to be certain at that time that Muslims were indeed violent terrorists and that Islam demeaned women and so forth. The one salutary effect that may have come out of my aversion to Islam at that stage was the fact that I continued asking my friend questions. That is, it was the same disdain for Islam that actually created a curiosity to learn more about the religion.

Fast forward two years and I found myself in Edmonton studying at the University of Alberta. I kept in touch with Bober during this time as we were in some classes together and we also had the same career aspirations. On occasion, I would visit Bober and his older brother Asim, also a student who lived near the University. I can recall being quite impressed with what I experienced at their apartment. Not only was I shown very good hospitality, but I also saw the two brothers and sometimes another friend or two praying at regular times, which was fascinating in itself. I actually made a remark to the leader of a Bible study that I was attending at the time that I was very impressed with Islam, owing in part to the excellent treatment I received from my Muslim friends.

There were a couple of times when I looked through the books they had on their shelf about Islam. One day, I flipped through a book called "Peshawar Nights". I did not examine it closely enough to understand what the basic thrust of the book was, but I did notice an argument being made about a linguistic detail in the Islamic scriptures. While I do not recall the exact argument that was made, I know that I was very impressed with the lengths that the scholars and theologians of this religion were willing to go to in order to expound upon a particular point of religion.

Another thing that impressed me early on was the high value placed on learning in Islam. I gleaned this from another book at my friends' apartment which I looked at one day. It explained the high value placed on knowledge and the high status accorded to those who possessed it. The text may have been referring to religious knowledge in particular but I took it more generally at that time.

Naturally the topic of religion would come up in conversation as I was in the apartment with Asim and Bober. Usually it was Asim who would answer the questions I had about Islam. Bober also showed me a website devoted to the polemic of Ahmed Deedat. I was impressed with the methods he used to refute Christian doctrines. It was the notion of employing logic and rhetoric to prove the veracity of one's beliefs that made an impression on me. There was also another reason why some of Deedat's claims were interesting to me.

I recall being in church one Sunday and it dawned upon me that Christians believe that Jesus is God. This happened while I was attending an evangelical church which I attended out of convenience even though I was raised as a catholic. This was quite a shock for me since for the first twenty years of my life I did not hold this belief. Of course I had heard people speak of Jesus as the son of God in the catholic church but I never imputed any special meaning to this term other than to imply that Jesus was a very holy man. The idea of Jesus as God was quite difficult for me to accept and I think it spurred even greater curiosity about religion and caused me to make more inquiries about Islam in particular since it took a very strong position on this issue as well. I suppose that this is why I took an interest in Deedat's vitriol since it addressed some of the questions that were going through my mind at the time.

I also enrolled in a course entitled "Introduction to Islam" to satisfy the growing interest that I had in Islam. Again, I remember being impressed with the level of scholarship that existed within the Islamic tradition and the lengths to which these scholars were willing to go to explain the details of ritual life. The idea that prayer could be so important as to necessitate such academic exposition left a lasting impression upon me, but nevertheless, it was not what I remember as being the highlight of the class.

One day the class watched a video of CNN's documentary of Michael Wolfe going

to Hajj. Although seeing brother Wolfe don the ihram and make his way into the holy city of Mecca did not strike me as anything special, I am certain that there was one scene that did. At one point during that particular Hajj, there was a scene where the *adhan* was made during the night with the moon clearly visible in the sky and the pilgrims in the Grand Mosque overflowing into the streets. I was amazed by this scene for never before had I seen spirituality manifested on such a large scale. I left the class awestruck and somewhat speechless, and I think at least one of the other students, whom I think was Muslim, felt the same way that I did. Even though I went away spellbound, I do not want you to think that I immediately embraced Islam owing to this experience. It would be another two years or so before I would finally accept Islam as my religion publicly.

During my time in Edmonton, beginning around the same time as my course on Islam, I could feel myself gravitating towards Islam. I found the motions performed during prayer to be interesting and for some reason I actually began to experiment with them on my own. It was during such an experiment, during *dhul-hijja* several years ago, that I found myself in a state of mild euphoria asking myself, "Is this what I am? Am I a Muslim?" The question excited me for a brief moment but then I realized that an answer in the affirmative could have quite far-reaching implications for my life so I fiercely resisted the idea. "No, I'm not sure. I have to know more about Islam before I can finally make a decision," I thought. So I proceeded along that pretext for another two years. During that period, I formulated objections to Islam in order to justify the resistance I was using to suppress the fact that I was inching closer and closer to Islam.

I would rationalize my resistance of Islam by telling myself that Islam was very violent and as such, it could not be a true religion. Or I would scrutinize the conduct of various Muslims just to use their misdeeds as an excuse to persist in disbelief. What I hope the reader will take away from this is that my decision to accept Islam was not at all spontaneous or the result of mere intuition. It was only after I admitted to myself that further resistance was pointless that I made the very deliberate decision to accept Islam. When I did so, I knew that Islam was the truth and the only way for me to follow.

Humans are creatures of habit. I believe that in the majority of cases, where someone is raised to think and act a certain way, the inertia in their beliefs causes them to become recalcitrant when confronted with opposing ideas. So it was in my case. However, the message of Islam is so very powerful that it tore me out of the comforting familiarity of Christianity only to face a more difficult and uncertain future. It is hard for me to explain exactly why this happened. When I encountered the Qur'an it challenged me in ways that I simply could not ignore, although I probably would have ignored it if I could have.

That said; it was not so much the message of the Qur'an as such that I found hard to accept. The notion of God as one without equal or partner seemed easy enough to digest and this is one of the things that appealed to me about Islam early on in my journey to this religion. I mentioned earlier that I never developed the belief in Jesus as God like many Christians believe. I think that it is very telling that left to my own devices, the conception I had of God was essentially the same as that which exists in Islam. In fact, though I have changed a great many of my beliefs and actions to be in accord with Islam, my conception of what God is never really changed. Initially, I found it very strange that Muslims placed so much emphasis on there being no god except God who has no partner since that much seemed so intuitive that it barely needed mentioning.

It was only after I had been drawn in by the message of oneness that I began to realize the stark changes that Islam demanded from its adherents and what these changes would mean for me; that I began to oppose the message that was finding acceptance in the innermost parts of my conscience. I found the prospect of giving up my old way of life and adopting a completely different worldview to be simply too much at that time. Sayyid Mawdudi has stated that accepting the truths of the unity of God and the hereafter require that people "give up their unrestrained freedom to live as they [please], and...[subject] their lives to a set of moral restrictions" (Commentary on the Qur'an,10:19).

I think that this is exactly what I feared so much subconsciously. After all, Islam is more than prayer and fasting during certain times and days. It is an entire worldview demanding both thought and action. It means far more than abjuring bars and other haunts of debauchery. It is much more than all of this as the lives of many great contemporary Muslims have shown. This is not to say that I believe I fall into the category of the likes of Sayyid Qutb or others who have worked for Islam but it means that ideally, one should strive with all they can for the sake of Islam:

"Say: truly, my prayer and my service of sacrifice, my life and my death, are all for God, the Cherisher of the Worlds; no partner hath He: this I am commanded, and I am the first of those who bow to His Will"

[Qur'an, 6:162-163]

I honestly did try to reject Islam, many times. However, as I have said earlier, people are creatures of habit and this accounts for much of the resistance that I, and many others no doubt, have mustered against the call to Islam. What enabled me to overcome that resistance and what still does enable me to overcome my resistance is the notion that what I do is for God and no other. IF there are difficulties along the way, it is because I have allowed error to infiltrate my life and my mind, hindering me from the path to true felicity. It is only through the realisation that Islam is the key to prosperity in both this world and the hereafter that one can embrace Islam with clear conviction.

"Say: 'If you do love God, follow me: God will love you and forgive you your sins; for God is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful"

[Qur'an, 3:31]

David Kolinsky, 3rd year Law student
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Narrated Anas bin Malik (*radi' Allahu' anhu*): *Allah's Prophet (sallAllahu alaihi wasallam) used to say, "O Allah! I seek refuge with You from incapacity and laziness, from cowardice and geriatric old age, and seek refuge with You from the punishment of the grave, and I seek refuge with You from the afflictions of life and death."* [Bukhari]

3 Nervous Soph... Plus 1 Hip Frosh (omores)

It was a beautiful Friday afternoon when "The Dream" Abdur-Raheem Karim Alawudeen was carrying a box of storybooks back from Hart House after *Jumma* prayers. He had been engaged in the pleasant task of reading stories to visiting children after prayers.

Today Abdur-Raheem had been reading one of his all time favorites entitled "Akbar Takes His Camel to the Eaton's Centre." These acts of kindness were all apart of the former Fresh Prince of Gerrard St.'s transition from being a 24/7 party animal to a sincere servant of Allah (*subhanahu wa ta'ala*). It all started when our God conscience heroes Nakiwalla, Allahwalla, and the tiny Giddawalla had saved him from a pact of wild billy goats and a husky brother and sister duo during frosh week. In exchange, Abdur-Raheem promised to learn about Islam, which as he now began to realize, wasn't such a bad deal. Sure, getting up for *Fajr* took a little training, but it sure beat his crappy mood swings and unproductive days from the party all night and sleep all day gig. And the early to rise routine was doing wonders for his complexion! His epic arguments with his parents were subsiding and his grades had never been better. But most importantly, remembering Allah *(subhana wa ta'ala)* gave him the piece of the puzzle in his life that was missing for so long. But all that was now about to change...

" W U Z Z Z Z Z Z UUUUUUUPPPPPPPPPPPPPPP!!!!!!!!" came a thunderous roar that shattered the once peaceful afternoon scene. Suddenly the sound of a boom box grew louder and louder as its sound waves pulsated through the streets. Abdur-Raheem froze as his heart sank into his stomach. He had been dodging his past for months, but it had finally caught up with him. Slowly turning around, he forced a nervous twitching smile, and addressed his nemesis.

"Hey guys, how's it going?" squeaked Abdur-Raheem.

"Brotha, where've you been hiding all term? We've been having a riot without you man!" replied an upbeat and boisterous student. Hopping out of their souped up 1989 Gerrard St. rickshaw, a quartet of students emerged wearing pretty boy silk shirts and glistening gold earrings. They comprised Abdur-Raheem's old high school "crew." Nabeel, Sabeel, Shakeel, and Adeel were his brothers in sin; masters of the club scene known best for cheating their way into university, immodestly neglecting to lower their gaze around girls, and their prized acne free faces. Their secret? A combination of Clearasel and Olay - 5 times a day.

"This place is DA BOMB! Da frat parties are hype! Da parents think we're studying all night! And we just came back from a 2-for-1 after shave and skin moisturizer sale. You used to be da first one in line for those things. What's with the Da Vinici look and nerdy books?" questioned Nabeel, referring to Abdur-Raheem's new goatee and the storybooks he was carrying.

"Hey, they're not nerdy books! They have pictures in them!" interjected an offended Abdur-Raheem.

"OK, no sweat. I was just beginning to wonder if you were still one of us, because if you are, you won't turn down an offer to rejoin your old boyz. U of T's having a Talent Jam tomorrow night and we want to get back together and do what we do best..... Arabic *Bhangra* (a cultural dance normally done in Punjabi)! Adeel has already got the whole dance translated into Arabic and choreographed! The dance routine will be a legend. Its called `Sharukh Khan versus Prince Nasim in a Steel Cage Match!' That's why we need you, our master *dhanda* (baton) thrower!" finished an energized Nabeel eagerly looking for a positive response from Abdur-Raheem.

"I don't know," began Abdur-Raheem who felt torn between two worlds. On the one hand he didn't want go back to his unlawful, silk wearing, immodestly boogying ways, but on the other hand he didn't want his friends to think he was a dweeb for not partaking in the dance. "Geez man, I wish I could, but I've got this like huge essay due, worth 50% of my mark. "AWW!" yelled Abdur-Raheem after being smacked by Adeel.

"Don't be a fool! Eat yo *pool* (beans), and jam with yo old bros!"

"It's alright Adeel. This is exactly what I thought would happen. He's changed, he ain't one of us anymore, he's a.....he's a.....cockroach!"

"Yeah!" jumped in Sabeel desiring attention. "He's one of dem rodent LIBRARY cockroaches!" he finished, proud of himself for conjuring up such a complex insult.

"AHH!" gasped Abdur-Raheem in disgust.

"Am not!" he protested.

"Am too! I mean, are too!" shouted the slow-witted Sabeel.

"Am not, and I'll prove it. I'll be at the dumb competition!" blurted out Abdur-Raheem before he realized what he had just said. A devious grin spread over Nabeel's face.

"Good. It looks like the Backstreet *dhanda* boys are back! See you tomorrow morning for rehearsal," finished Nabeel as he and his entourage hopped back into Gerrard Street rickshaw and speed off.

"What have I done?" thought a distraught Abdur-Raheem. "There's still one place I can turn for help!" he thought to himself.

Not too long, long later, in a building far, far away, the Allah-Conscience Trio, Nakiwallah, Allahwalla, and Giddawalla, were up to their usual *halal* antics.

"Guys, I need your help! Are you busy?" asked Abdur-Raheem frantically pacing the room.

"No, not at all, we were just knitting display quilts for our dear mothers! See, each patch is one of Allah (*subhanahu wa ta'ala*)'s ninety-nine names!" beamed Allahwalla.

"Oh, yeah, that's swell. Anyway, you see guys, I kinda said I would get back with my old bros and do this Arabic *Bhangra* dance

with them, but its just not me anymore, you know. And, and we're going to have to wear silk and dance in front of girls and if I back out they're going to think I'm a library cockroach!" finished a distraught Abdur-Raheem as he buried his head in his hands.

"AGH!" gasped the trio in unison.

"This situation is grave indeed," said a very disturbed Nakiwalla. "But do not fear, Allah (*subhanahu wa ta'ala*) is near! We'll arrange an alternative entertainment that is just as spiffy as their dance," cleverly added Nakiwalla.

"We can have a poem recital! I've been eager to share my poem about the virtues of being an obedient son to my dear mother," said the shy Giddawalla excitedly.

"Or we could have a game of spin the *ittar* (perfume) bottle, and whoever gets chosen gets to give a *khutbah* (sermon)!" added an ecstatic Allahwalla.

"HMM, Qur'anic Kareokee was a big hit last year," added Nakiwalla. "Or we can send the sisters to the MSA's sisters' talent night, and have brothers' talent night for ourselves."

"Yes, but what would we do in it my brother in Islam?" asked a puzzled Allahwalla.

"Well, the sisters have an international fashion show, and so should we. We will call it 'Beard Styles From Around the World'" dreamily finished Nakiwalla.

"GUYS! This isn't going to work! I'll just have to go through with the dumb dance." finished a demoralized Abdur-Raheem, who hung his head in defeat and slithered out of the room.

"We're not just going to give up on Abdur-Raheem are we?" asked Allahwalla.

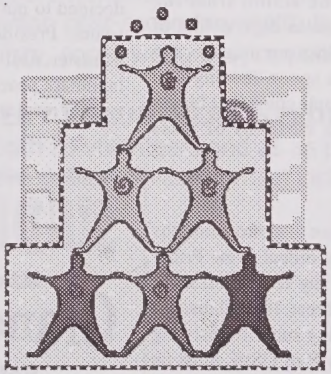
"Of course not, he is our brother in Islam, and we will help him in his time of need!" began Nakiwalla." These naughty boys from his past have convinced him to participate in a most un-*halaal* dancing event." Allahwalla and Giddawalla sat in silent contemplation. "I know!" finally gasped Giddawallah who was slowly learning to assert himself. "We must infiltrate this jam and show the audience that the milk and honey of *Jannah* are far superior to any worldly jams."

"Excellent idea my brother in Islam, and here's how we will accomplish this....." plotted Nakiwalla.

Outside, Abdur-Raheem's mood hadn't changed. "What was I thinking? A Talent Jam??" sighed Abdur-Raheem as he sat down for *Zuhr* prayers and realized what he had just gotten himself into. "How could I just let my old crew con me in like that? Why can't they see that I've just made changes in my life? But I can't let those guys think I'm a loser. I'll have to go through with the dance. Allah will understand it's just this once." He tried to reassure himself, but was still uneasy.

The fateful Saturday evening had arrived, and the Trio was about to implement their plan. When they arrived, they had no trouble getting in. Scanning their long beards, the doorman thought they were part of the 'Survivor Skit.'

"Yes indeed," beamed Allahwalla. "We are surviving by the grace of Allah (*subhanahu wa ta'ala)*." The time had arrived for the final act. The time had come for Abdur-Raheem's crew to perform the Arab-*Bhangra* thriller, the most anticipated act of the evening. As his team performed spectacular leaps, throws and catches, spins and twirls with their colorful silk shirts and *panchees* (skirts) flying in practice, they were about to begin the real thing. The skillful opening twirls of the *dhandas* (batons) had the audience transfixed. The first major routine was a rotating pyramid made up of the entire dance troupe. Abdur-Raheem, being the most flexible and agile of the group, had always been the one to top off the pyramid (of course he had previously believed it was his supposed smashing good looks that earned him that honor).



Abdur-Raheem was behind the curtain, about to jump out onto the springboard and leap to his place at the top of the pyramid as the dhandas whirled dangerously below. Suddenly, the trio arrived.

" Abdur-Raheem, you can't do this! Do not succumb to the temptation and do not do this just to please others. You have nothing to prove to anyone! We're your brothers and we're here to stand up for you!" cried a poetic Nakiwalla.

Just then one of the troupe members, Shakeel who was a bigger fellow and normally upheld the base of the tower, poked his head behind the curtain. "Abdur-Raheem, get out here now! The pyramid is ready!" he whispered loudly.

"I've gotta do this. You don't understand! It's a matter of pride," he cried shaking his head sadly.

Just then, Shakeel stuck his arm behind the curtain and grabbed the first thing he caught hold of – the tiny Giddawalla in his new green thobe!

"We've got no time for the springboard lil' buddy, you gotta get to the top of that pyramid and fast before the audience loses its patience and we lose our reps," huffed the big guy as he focused on the top of the pyramid. He rolled Giddawalla up like a ball and tossed him to the top of the pyramid. Giddawalla wailed out a terrified scream as he flew through the air.

"Yeeeooooowwwwwww!" he shrieked. He finally opened his eyes in time to see that he was about to overshoot the two guys waiting for him to take his place at the top. They reached out just in time to catch him by the ankles and steady him into position. Giddawalla couldn't believe he was still alive and began to make *dua* and thank Allah *(subhanahu wa ta'ala)* for allowing him to survive the ordeal. The entire pyramid began to rotate as the *dhandas* were thrown higher into the air. Suddenly, one of the *dhandas* became entangled in Giddawalla's long beard! Being unfamiliar with the intricacies of pyramidal balance, Giddawalla began to wobble and flailed his arms frantically. The bottom level moved around trying to steady the whole, but it was too late! The three layer pyramid came tumbling to the ground with screams and howls as faces were stepped on and colorful silk shirts and *panchees* were grabbed for dear life, to the tune of Arabic-Bhangra dance mix.

"We're ruined!" cried Abdur-Raheem. "What were you guys thinking?" He was mortified that his new friends had ruined the act. As the disheveled dance troop crawled off the stage, Allahwalla scurried to the DJ and had him play the trio's pre-made rap music to a re-mixed tune of Gangsta's Paradise (made with *halaal* instruments of course). Nakiwalla and Allawalla cleared their throats and began rapping on cue:

... '3 Nervous Frosh' continued from previous page

"We're here today to tell you the tale of the day
About the land of milk and honey not greed and money
It's called paradise, paradise, that's the place
It's the gift for belief so prepare for it with haste
Here believers will find joy and eternal peace
Without worrying about paying the bills
and the expiration of the lease
All you have to do is put your trust in The Creator
Who loves you more than I do my calculator
So you betta watch out , He may have a
blessing waiting fo' you
and you and your homies might be going to heaven too
I'm the kinda guy who wants you to see
the gift of eternal light
So I'm up early saying prayers for all y'all
and still praying late at night.
Praying God will lead us all to what's right.
So I ask you all to keep fighting the good fight.
Keep spending our lives, striving for a believer's paradise
And making sure our actions are free of senseless vice."

Abdur-Raheem was about to die of embarrassment when he saw the audience giving the trio a standing ovation and people coming up to them afterwards and asking what inspired them to write such a moving rap.

"Our inspiration is the infinite mercy of Allah (*subhanahu wa ta'ala*) and his gift of Islam," beamed the trio as they began answering the questions of the audience members.

"Abdur-Raheem, what's the deal with these guys?" asked Nabeel

"I'm sorry man," responded Abdul-Raheem apologetically for messing up their dance.

"You best be! That's the only reason I'd forgive you for not introducing me to such a hype group of homies!" laughed Nabeel as he and his friends approached the trio to learn more about this "Creator" they had been rapping about.

"You guys never cease to amaze me," sighed Abdur-Raheem. "You're a really cool bunch, and I'm proud to have you as members of my new and improved crew," finished Abdur- Raheem as he winked at Allah (*subhanahu wa ta'ala*) for blessing him with such devoted friends.

Ayesha Sharieff, University of Toronto (Erindale)
and Fatima Butt, University of Toronto (St.George)

... 'Newsdesk' continued from pg 10

safer from future attacks? Somehow I have a hard time picturing Saddam strategically coordinating transnational terrorist agendas from his rat-hole.

The war was still unjust and we should not lose sight of the lies and manipulation used by the Bush administrative to sell it. Yes, Saddam's rule was oppressive; but two wrongs don't make a right. Besides, the rising toll of American and Iraqi deaths due to Iraqi insurgence hints that the country may not be as grateful as Bush would like us to believe under this new authoritative rule. Perhaps it has something to do with the U.S. asserting that Iraq should be handed over immediately to the Iraqis, while simultaneously dangling reconstruction contracts for post-war Iraq to the international community. This is only one action from the hypocritical behaviour of Bush that continues to deprive him of U.N. backing and legitimacy in Iraq. One hopes our neighbors to the south would see beyond Bush's media spoon-feeding and prevent the re-election of a man who many people consider a bigger threat to world peace than any imagined weapons of mass destruction.

3. Fears Fly High

The Arar case is no closer to resolution more than three months after he arrived in Toronto after a harrowing ordeal. New Prime Minister Paul Martin has denounced "leaks" by federal officials that purportedly identified him as a terrorist threat. He will discuss the matter with President Bush at an upcoming summit, insisting that the Canadian government, not just RCMP or CSIS, must be notified and involved in any decision to send its citizens overseas.

New names of Canadians being deported or held at U.S. bases such as Guantanamo Bay are cropping up at an alarming pace. New U.S. security measures, which involve fingerprinting and photographing all Canadian visa holders, have raised the paranoia level even further. Several U of T students who traveled to the U.S. over the Christmas break reported unnecessary hassles by U.S. officials once they were found to be Muslim or from Arab countries.

It is understandable that the U.S. is anxious about a repeat of 9/11. But overdrawn measures that single out a group of people are only going to increase tensions and further alienate the Muslim population. It seems the U.S.'s strategy for fighting terrorism consists of invading countries with no link to Al-Qaeda or stepping on people's toes at home.

4. India and Pakistan Talk Peace

After more than five decades of violence and two years after a nuclear war almost erupted over Kashmir, India and Pakistan have decided to put aside their differences and negotiate on some key issues. President General Pervez Musharraf and Indian Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee have set a February date for the landmark peace talks. This is a welcome change of events and any type of resolution will be a step in the right direction.

Nuzhat Khurshid, 2nd year Humanities
University of Toronto (St. George)

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POETRY CORNER

Da'wah Star

Da'wah Star
O' Da'wah Star
Shining so Bright,
By the Mercy of ALLAH's Might,
Being the light
To guide others to the path that's right.

Da'wah is an obligation for us to treasure,
For it is a way to reach the ultimate goal, i.e. seeking ALLAH's pleasure,
The Magnitude of which, we cannot measure.

You took on the task, to show others the path,
To help them avoid, ALLAH's Wrath.

So must we All,
Hear this Call,
With eager & keen,
Show our brothers & sisters in humanity, this uplifting & illuminating Deen.

Jazak Allahu Khairan Da'wah Star,
Praise be to the ONE, Ar-Rahmaan who brought you this far,

A lesson to be learnt for us all,
To achieve the ultimate goal.....
WE MUST STAND TALL

Da'wah Star
O' Da'wah Star .....

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Faculty of Medicine
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MUSLIMS & MUSLIMAHS... ISLAM'S IN THE HOUSE

One for the 'ummah[1], two for the deen[2]
Three for the sunnah[3], four for the 'alimeen[4]
Read the Qur'an[5] and praise our Allah[6]
(Subhanahu Wa Ta'ala))
Obey His commands and perform your salah[7]
Perform your hajj[8] and observe your sawm[9]
Wake up for fajr[10], it's better than nawm[11]
Obtain good knowledge, so to others you may teach;
But make sure you practice before you preach.

One for the ummah, two for the deen
Three for the sunnah, four for the 'alimeen
With love and respect, should we treat all things
Give zakah[12] to the needy- it's barakah[13] that it brings!
On seeing fellow Muslims, give them our salam[14]
And let's not backbite, 'cause we all know it's haram[15]
Keep good relations with family and friends;
If they ever sever, try your best to make amends.

One for the ummah, two for the deen
Three for the sunnah, four for the 'alimeen
Let's try to be consistent, in all that we do
Including our 'ibaadah[16] and our 'adaab[17], too.
Let's put together, all of our aqlam[18]
So that we can spread, our deen, al-islam
Under one roof, let all of us unite
So the torch of Allah (Subhanahu Wa Ta'ala), we can raise and ignite!

One for the 'ummah, two for the deen
Three for the sunnah, four for the 'alimeen
La ilha illallah, Muhammad ur-rasool ullah[19]!

Rashida Morisiya
2nd year, Double major in chemistry & biology
University of Toronto (St George)

[1]collectively, all Muslims
[2]faith
[3]the way of Prophet Muhammad (SAW)
[4]islamic scholars
[5]Holy book of Islam
[6]God
[7]the five daily prayers
[8]obligatory pilgrimage to Makkah
[9]fast
[10]morning prayer
[11]sleep
[12]charity
[13]abundance, blessing
[14]greeting of peace
[15]sinful
[16]worship
[17]islamic etiquette
[18]pens
[19]"There is no god but God, and Muhammad is His messenger"

All is, Should be, For ALLAH (Subhanahu Wa Ta'ala)

Silence,
Twisting autumn winds swirl leaves,
'Crackles',

A chirp,
Sounds,
then quiet,
'Allahu Akbar' then loudly sounds
and then, all those waiting upon the near-empty
branches, rise with grace and leave,

Distanced moods, swings,
And no sound enters a mind,
That which speaks effortlessly,
Using an unheeding tongue,
TONGUE: aaah, a tool to be greatly questioned,
And no soul will escape then
From their result, end

Empty, Black HOLES,
A bold sign,
Staring at wide-opened minds,
Reminding of the GREAT Gap...
In our not-so-very vast knowledge
KNOWLEDGE: hmm, not so **very** much

Low empty hearts,
CRY, from what they see around,
Their hearts in constant battle,
Against those that stare and do wrong,
While knowing and understanding TRUTH,
D I S T R A C T I N G

Eyes covered in shine,
Look high, towards the sky, then **cry...**
Asking for mercy...whispering:
'Oh Allah (*Subhanahu Wa Ta'ala*) ,**Bestow** on me mercy..'
quitens, and all that sounds
are the breaths drawn-in,
crying, crying, to Allah (*Subhanahu Wa Ta'ala*)

By- 'Noor Syed'.

Great Muslim:

Jamaluddin Afghani (1838-1897) was a wandering missionary who advocated Muslim unity to make Islam a great force in the world. He wanted to free the world of Islam from foreign domination.

He was born at Asadabad near Kanar in the district of Kabul in Afghanistan in 1254/ 1838. Before he was 18 he studied all the branches of Islamic learning and was well versed in Holy Qur'an, *Hadith*, *Fiqh*, philosophy, metaphysics, mathematics, medicine, science, astronomy and astrology. His mission in life was to bring about an awakening among Muslims throughout the world and liberate them from external influence and exploitation; thereby creating a powerful Muslim empire.

He entered India via Tehran when he was hardly 18. After staying there for a year, he proceeded to Hejaz for performing Hajj. He stayed in Hejaz for a year. From there he returned to Afghanistan and entered the service of Amir Dost Muhammad Khan. He accompanied the Amir on his campaign against heart. After the Amir's death, the throne was occupied by Sher Ali who disliked Jamaluddin because of his revolutionary and progressive ideas. Jamaluddin decided to leave Afghanistan. The Iranian ambassador in Afghanistan was all along requesting the Afghan government not to allow Jamaluddin to go to Iran. So, on his request the Afghan government allowed Jamaluddin to leave for Hejaz on the condition that he wouldn't pass through Iran.

He left Afghanistan for Hejaz via India. Because of the first war of independence in 1857 when the Indians had made a concerted effort to overthrow the British, he was not allowed to meet Indian Muslim leaders except under the watchful eyes of the intelligence people. He was sent in a government ship to Cairo. Here he came in contact with Al-Azhar circles and had private and useful talks with them. Then he proceeded to Turkey. As a great reputation preceded him, he was given a grand welcome by Aly Pasha, Prime Minister of Turkey. He was appointed to the Council of Education and was also invited to give

public lectures in Ahmadiya *masjid* and Hagia Sophia. He became a member of Danish Osmani, an important organization with young Turks as its members. His popularity worried the Turkish *ulama*. Shaikhul Islam took objection to certain parts of his lecture delivered by him in Darul-Fanun. In order to deport him from Turkey they issued a *fatwa* branding Jamaluddin a *kafir* for his unor-thodox ideas. A royal decree was issued asking Jamaluddin to leave Turkey immediately.

From here, again Jamaluddin pro-ceeded to Cairo. The government had granted him an annual allowance of 12,000 Egyptian piastres without binding him to any specific official duty. The British were afraid of the pan-Islamism preached by Afghani and his hatred against colonialism. They, in the tradition of the Crusaders, wanted to weaken the Muslim world. According to Stoddar, in *The New World of Islam* "Djemal-ed Din was the first 'Muslim' who fully grasped the impending peril of western domination and he devoted his life to warning the Islamic world of the danger and attempted to elaborate measures of defense."

The British instigated the orthodox theologians who started a campaign of vilification. The British governor-general advised the Egyptian government to order his expulsion. He was deported. He arrived in Hyderabad Deccan (India). Here he composed his famous treatise *Refutation of Materialism*. At that time, the nationalist reforms took place in Egypt and Jamaluddin was suspected to have participated. He was put under police surveillance and brought to Calcutta where he was placed under house arrest. After the nationalist struggle subsided in Egypt, Jamaluddin was released. Wherever he went (Hyderabad, Calcutta, Bombay or Patna) he was arousing people's feelings against western colonialism. According to Dr. Iqbal, "He wrote little, spoke much and thereby transformed into miniature Jamaluddins all those who came in contact with him."

From India he left for London and after a few days arrived in Paris where he stayed for about three years. He started publishing a magazine *Urwat-al-Wuthka* (La Lien Indissoluble). The British put a ban on its entry into India due to its spreading of hatred against Western imperialism. He also wrote in French magazines, articles on the condition of Indian Muslims. To this period also belongs his polemic with the Frenchman Ernest Renan who, in his lecture *Islam and Science*, stated that Islam did not favour scientific activity.

Jamaluddin refuted this by quoting from the Holy Qur'an and the *Hadith* to prove that in fact Islam encouraged the pursuit of knowledge. In Paris he met an Englishman Wilfred Blunt who became his close friend. Blunt wrote in one of his books that before proceeding to India he had obtained three letters from Jamaluddin addressed to his friends in India introducing Blunt. Blunt further says that when he visited Jamaluddin's friends separately with the letters, all of them got up and kissed the letters and showed Blunt the utmost respect. This is the love and respect that Indian Muslims had for Jamaluddin. Even today,

Messenger of Allah (*sal Allahu 'alayhi wasallam*) said:

Our Lord (glorified and exalted be He) descends each night to the earth's sky when there remains the final third of the night, and He says: Who is saying a prayer to Me that I may answer it? Who is asking something of Me that I may give it him? Who is asking forgiveness of Me that I may forgive him?

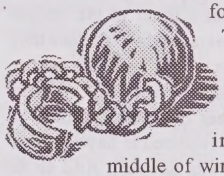
-related by al-Bukhari

Jamaluddin Afghani

most Muslim countries have a street named after Jamaluddin Afghani.

Randolph Churchill, who was a friend of Blunt, had become Prime Minister of England so Blunt invited Jamaluddin to England. He went there and apprised Churchill of the problems faced by Muslims in India and elsewhere. In spite of his best efforts, there was no solution.

Jamaluddin then proceeded to Russia. He thought that with the help of the Russians he could free Muslims from British bondage. He had influential friends in the imperial court and he met the Czar several times. He also persuaded him to allow printing of the Holy Qur'an in Russia, which had been banned earlier. In St. Petersburg, he met the ruler of Persia, Shah Nasiruddin Gachar. He was impressed by Jamaluddin and appointed him as Prime Minister in Iran. Jamaluddin's popularity, because of his lectures, created apprehensions in the Shah's mind. Jamaluddin, sensing trouble, retired to a sanctuary and remained there for seven months.



The Shah had him arrested by 500 soldiers and had him carried in chains in the middle of winter. Jamaluddin was expelled from Iran, & left for Basra. Later on, arriving in London, U.K., he received a written invitation from Sultan Abdul Hamid of Turkey to settle permanently in Constantinople as the Sultan's guest. A beautiful house near the palace was allotted to him. From here he continued to expose the tyrannical rule in Iran. In 1895, the Shah was assassinated. The Persian government demanded the extradition of four persons suspected of plotting the assassination, from the Ottoman Empire. One of them was Jamaluddin. The Ottoman government surrendered the three but refused to hand over Jamaluddin. In 1897, Jamaluddin died of cancer at the age of sixty.

To Jamaluddin Afghani, all Muslims were brothers, united by their common bond, Islam. Today, the Islamic world is in a state of complete disarray. Muslim countries, in spite of possessing wealth, are economically under the clutches of others. They are politically weak and there is no unity among them. It is high time we took a lesson from Jamaluddin Afghani. Maulana Zafar Ali Khan writes that "Jamaluddin Afghani warned the world of Islam that if they were to survive they should unite. Disunity and division, he warned, would weaken them and would bring about their ultimate ruin."

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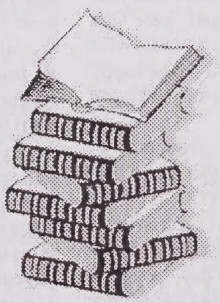

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Great Muslimah:

In our last discussion on great Muslim women, we examined the life of Umm Darda al-Sughra (May Allah*subhana wa ta'ala* be well pleased with her). *Insha'Allah*, from her noble character, we learned our own deficiencies and the work we need to do on ourselves in order to be better children, spouses, parents, human beings, and most importantly, better slaves of Allah (*subhana wa ta'ala*)– Muslims. At present we will be taking a look at another of the greatest female saints of Basra. Umm Darda was one, Rabi'a al-'Adawiya (May Allah subhana wa ta'ala have mercy on them both), is another.

Rabi'a al-'Adawiya (May Allah *subhana wa ta'ala* have mercy on her) is arguably the most famous female Muslim ascetic of all time. So much has been written and said about her that here we will simply give a brief biography followed by some famous recorded sayings of hers that we hope, will inspire us to reflect upon our own lives and the way we spend our time.

Rabi'a al-'Adawiya bint Isma'il (May Allah *subhana wa ta'ala* have mercy on her) was born in approximately 717 C.E. in Basra, modern-day Iraq, the daughter of a poor, but righteous father. It is reported that she was stolen as a child and sold into slavery, but later released by her master on account of her piety, for after having done her chores all day she would forsake sleep to pray throughout the night. After having lived in the desert for some time as a free woman, she moved to Basra where she taught Sufyan al-Thawri, Shaqiq al-Balkhi, and others (May Allah *subhana wa ta'ala* have mercy on them all). Her way was the path of Love for Allah *(subhana wa ta'ala)* for the sole sake of His being Lord of the Worlds. She was a legal and spiritual authority to the scholars of her time and has left behind many beautiful supplications.

Imam al-Ghazali mentions a story about Rabi'a in his magnum opus: "Muhammad ibn Sulayman al-Hashimi, whose daily revenues on his worldly investments amounted to eighty thousand dirhams, once sent a letter to the people and scholars of Basra, asking whether they knew of a woman whom he could marry. They all concurred that Rabi'a al-'Adawiya (may God show her His mercy) should be the one [Rabi'a is reported to have been as beautiful as she was devout]. And so he wrote to her in this wise: 'In the name of God, most Compassionate and Merciful! To Proceed. God (Exalted is He!) has given me an income of eighty thousand dirhams every day out of the things of this world, and it will not be long before this becomes a full hundred thousand, of which I shall give you riches in proportion, so accept my offer!' And she wrote back as follows: 'In the name of God, most Compassionate and Merciful! To proceed. The renunciation of this world brings tranquility to heart and body alike, whereas to desire it bring worry and grief. When you receive this letter of mine, then prepare your provisions, and address yourself to your fate. Be the counsellor of your own soul, and let not other men be your counsellors, lest they divide up your wealth. Fast without cease, and break your fast with death. As for myself, were God (Exalted is He!) to give me many times what He has given to you, I would not be happy to be distracted from Him for the blinking of an eye'.

She is reported to have said: "For everything there is a fruit (*thamara*), and the fruit of the knowledge of God (*ma'rifa*) is in orienting oneself toward God at all times (*iqbal*)." This is a vital point. Islam is not simply praying five times a day, fasting in Ramadan and seeking sacred knowledge once or twice a year at lectures. The attitude that if one does these, they can do as they wish in other facets of life and be considered people who are 'balancing *deen* and dunya" is a grave falsity. In the Qur'an, Allah *(subhana wa ta'ala)* says:

"Behold! In the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the alteration of Night and Day there are indeed signs for men of understanding, - Men who remember Allah subhana wa ta'ala standing, sitting, and lying down on their sides, and contemplate the (wonders of) creation in the heavens and the earth, (with the saying): 'Our Lord not for naught hast Thou created (all) this! Glory be to Thee! Give us Salvation from the Chastisement of the Fire!'

[Qur'an, 3:190-191]

Islam is more than just outward action, as Ibn Ata'illah said: "Actions are merely propped-up shapes. Their life-breath is the presence of the secret of sincerity in them." This sincerity is something that for most requires much work in order to attain. Layers of rust that have formed on the spiritual heart by way of living in the world and feeding one's base desires, must be removed and the light of God's guidance must be able to shine through. One of the keys to such a cleansing is by becoming people of remembrance of Allah *(subhana wa ta'ala)* . As one Shaykh said so beautifully: "Continuous remembrance gives direction to the spirit, cures all ills, and awakens one's soul. It cleanses the heart from all else but Allah (*subhana wa ta'ala)* and increases His love in one's heart. As this remembrance descends from the tongue to the heart and penetrates from the heart to the soul, one rises closer and closer to one's Maker. In continuing repeating the phrase *la ilaha illAllah*, the heart joins the tongue, the mind is cleansed of imagination, the rust upon the heart is burnt, the darkness turns into day, and the candle of the mind is put out by the sun of the Divine light". The Messenger of Allah (*sal Allahu 'alayhi wasallam*) said: The difference between those who remember Allah (*subhana wa ta'ala)* and those who do not is like the difference between the living and the dead! In relation to this sincerity that we as Muslims are to seek, Rabi'a once said "I ask God's forgiveness for my lack of truthfulness in saying 'I ask God's

And whoever puts his trust in God, then God suffices him.

[Qur'an, 65:3]

Rabi'a al-'Adawiya

forgiveness'". On another occasion she is reported to have said "My sorrow is not from feeling sad. Rather my sorrow is from not feeling sad enough".

Once Sufyan al-Thawri asked Rabi'a "'What is the best way for the slave (*'abd*) to come close to God, the Glorious and Mighty?' She wept and replied: how can the likes of me be asked such a thing? The best way for a slave to come close to God Most High is for him to know that he must not love anything in this world or the Hereafter other than Him". Another time some men visiting Rabi'a brought up the world and began criticizing it. Rabi'a said: "Verily, I see the world in its entirety in your hearts!" They replied: "How did you come to imagine this about us?" She said: "Because you concerned yourselves with the closest thing to your hearts and spoke about it".

So devout a servant was Rabi'a, that "'Abis ibn Marhum al-'Attar (the Spice-Merchant) said: 'Abda bint Abi Shawwal (one of the best slave-women of God who also served Rabi'a) related to me: Rabi'a used to pray the entire night. When dawn began to break she would take a short rest until it had fully appeared. She would leap up from her place of sleep as if in alarm, and I would hear her say: 'Oh soul! How long will you sleep? And how long will it be before you awaken? Your sleep is nearly as deep as the sleep from which you will awaken when the trumpet heralds the Day of Resurrection!'". Rabi'a's area of prostration is said to have resembled a puddle of water because of her intense weeping in worship.

Having lived her life as such, 'Abda said that when death was near, Rabi'a summoned her and said, "Oh 'Abda! Do not inform anyone of my death. Just wrap me in this shroud of mine". 'Abda said: "So we wrapped her in that shroud and woollen veil that she used to wear…After a year or so, I saw Rabi'a in my sleep dressed in a bright green dress and a veil made of green silk brocade. Never before had I seen something so beautiful. I said: 'Oh Rabi'a! What happened to the shroud and woollen veil in which we wrapped you?' She said: "By God, they were taken from me and were replaced with what you see on me now. My shrouds were wrapped, sealed, and lifted up to the highest heaven so that God's forgiveness for me on the Day of Judgment would be complete.'"

Imam Ghazali mentions the following story: "Said Bashshar ibn Ghalib al-Najrani, 'I once saw Rabi'a al-'Adawiya, the worshipper [*al-'abida*] in my sleep, it having been my custom to pray for her abundantly. "Oh Bashshar ibn Ghalib," she told me. "Your gifts come to me covered with silken cloths upon salvers of light." How should that be?" I asked, and she replied, "Thus are the prayers of the living believers: when they offer a prayer for the deceased and are granted a response, that prayer is set upon salvers of light and covered with silken cloths, after which it is brought to the one who has died with the words, 'This is So-and-so's gift to you' ".' Imam Ghazali continues, "The Emissary of God (May God bless him and grant him peace) said, 'The dead man in his grave is like a drowning man shouting for help, as he waits for a prayer to come to him from his father, his brother or his friend. When it comes it is more beloved to him than the world and all it contains. Indeed, the gifts of the living to the dead are prayer and the petitioning of God for His forgiveness.'" This should serve to remind us of two things. Firstly, that while we are alive and thus not as a drowning man depending on the prayers of another, we should embrace Islam in every facet of life, for in our graves we will be alone with nothing but our deeds. Secondly, we should remember to pray for our deceased ancestors, teachers, friends, martyrs, and all Muslims and hope that the same will be done for us one day.

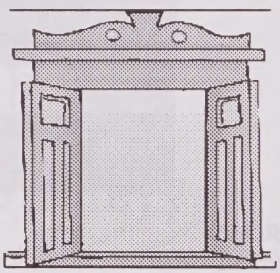
Rabi'a once said "You are but a set of numbered days. When one day goes, a part of you goes as well. And with the disappearance of the parts, the whole is nearly lost as well."

It is hoped that this look at the life of the great Muslimah servant of Allah *(subhana wa ta'ala)* , Rabi'a al- 'Adawiya has served to inspire us to worship more, to increase our sincerity and love in doing so, and to remember Allah (*subhana wa ta'ala)* in all of our actions. Allah *(subhana wa ta'ala)* says in the Qur'an, that

"***Truly in the remembrance of Allah do hearts find peace***".

[Qur'an, 13:28]

As Qur'an translator Yusuf Ali comments, this means that the Sign or Miracle is not external, but rather, it is internal – something in your mind, heart, and soul. If you turn to Allah (*subhana wa ta'ala)*, that light, that experience, will come. Accordingly, Ibn al-Qayyim al-Jawziyya writes: "Truly in the heart there is a void that cannot be removed except with the company of Allah *(subhana wa ta'ala)*. And in it there is a sadness that cannot be removed except with the happiness of knowing Allah *(subhana wa ta'ala)* and being true to Him. And in it there is an emptiness that cannot be filled except with love for Him and by turning to Him and always remembering Him. And if a person were given all of the world and what is in it, it would not fill this emptiness." On that note, we shall close with the words of Rabi'a, who, when Salih al-Murri said in her



presence, "He who persists in knocking at the door will have it opened for him", replied, "The door is already open. But the question is: Who wishes to enter it?"

May Allah *(subhana wa ta'ala)* increase us in knowledge and practice of that knowledge, and may He Mighty and Majestic beautify our character and make us from amongst those who worship and remember Him day and night. May we all enter that door. *Ameen.*

Rabi'a al-'Adawiya died in 801 C.E. May Allah *(subhana wa ta'ala)* have mercy on her and open the gates of *Jannah* (Paradise) to her. *Ameen.*

Nosheen Mian
4th yr, Islamic Studies & World Religions
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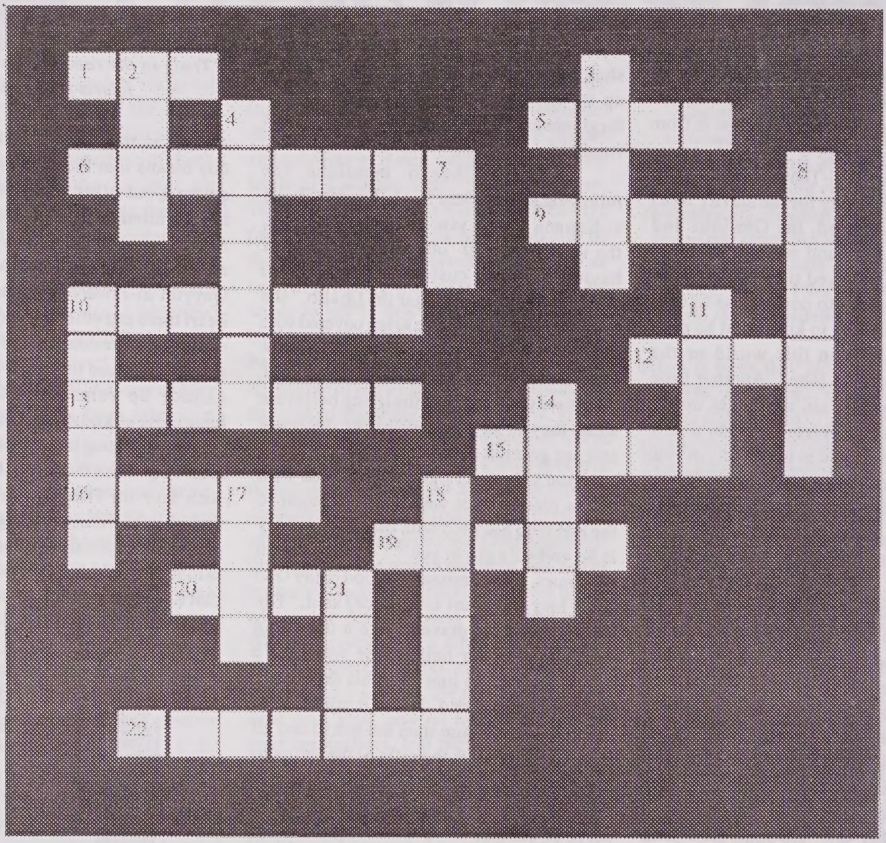
ENTERTAINMENT ENTERTAINMENT ENTERTAINMENT



ACROSS

1. Known as Sura-e-Maudhatyn
5. Was revealed after the treaty of Hudaibiyya in 6 AH
6. Surah Al-Ikhlas and Surah Al-_____: once started cannot be left halfway.
9. This surah was revealed twice; once in Mecca and once in Medina
10. Kaaba was built by these prophets; Abraham and _____
12. Where did Noah's ark rest after the great flood?
13. He guards the gate of the Paradise
15. He guards the gate of the Hellfire
16. A prophet who is also a prophet's son and a prophet's brother
19. English name for this surah is "The Dawn"
20. This surah narrates the story of "the Companions of the Cave"
22. Ayat-ul-Kursi is in Surah Al-_____

DOWN

2. He is "Abu-Bashr"
3. We commemorate Mi'raj in this month
4. Day of the Rising
7. Who was the first person to be given the title of "Rasool"?
8. He conveyed the revelation of The Holy Qur'an to Prophet Muhammad (sallahu alaihi wassalam)
10. The Angel of Death
11. Which surah refers to Allah's Kingdom?
14. This surah mentions about one of Prophet Muhammad's uncle
17. Which surah in the 30th chapter has a wajib sajdah
18. This surah does not start with Bismillah?
21. This eid is celebrated after the month of Ramadhan

STUMPED?

See the Answers on pg 16

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